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WHOM THE GODS DESTROYED

BY

JOSEPHINE DODGE DASKAM

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To

K. W.

WITH THE FRIENDSHIP OF

MANY YEARS

J. D. D.

(RECAP)
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WHOM THE GODS DESTROYED

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WHOM THE GODS DESTROYED

I

THE most high gods have decided that too much power over the hearts of men shall not be given to other men, for then the givers are forgotten in the gift and the smoke dies away from the altars. So they kill the men who play with souls. According to an ancient saying, before they destroy the victim they make him mad. There are, however, modifications of the process. Occasionally they make him drunk.

As I came down the board-walk that leads to the ocean, I saw by his staggering and swaying gait that the man was not only very drunk indeed, but that he gloried in the fact. This was shown by his brandishing arms and tossing head and the defiant air with which he regarded the cottages, before one of which he paused, leaned forward, placing one hand dramatically at his ear, and presently executed a wild dance of what was apparently derision. A timid woman would have

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retreated, but I am not timid, except when I am alone in the dark. Also I have what my brother-in-law calls Bohemian tastes. As nearly as I have been able to understand that phrase, it signifies a great interest in people, especially when they are at all odd. And this solitary, scornful dance of a ragged man before the Averys' cottage was odd in the extreme.

So I walked quietly along. When I reached the man I heard him muttering rapidly to himself, while he rested from the exertion of his late performance. What did dancing drunken men talk about? I walked slower. My brother-in-law says that a woman with any respect for the proprieties, to say nothing of the conventions, would never have done this. I have observed, however, that his feelings for the proprieties and the conventions, both of them, have on occasion suffered relapse, more especially at those times, prior to his marriage to my sister, when I, although supposed to be walking and riding and rowing and naphtha-launching with them, was frequently and inexcusably absent. So I gather that the proprieties

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and the conventions, like many other things, are relative.

As I passed the man he turned and looked crossly at me and spoke apparently to some one far away behind me, for he spoke with much force.

"Did you ever hear such damn foolishness?" he demanded. Now there was nothing to hear but Miss Kitty Avery playing Chopin's Fourth Ballade in F minor. She played it badly, of course, but nobody who knew Kitty Avery would have imagined that she would play otherwise than badly, and I have heard so much bad playing that I didn't notice it very much anyway. I thought it hardly probable that the man should know how unfortunate Kitty's method and selection were, so I passed directly by. Soon I heard his steps, and I knew he was coming after me. While he was yet some distance behind me he spoke again.

"I suppose that fool of a woman thinks she can play," he growled as he lurched against a lamp-post. Then I did the unpardonable deed. I turned and answered him.

"How do you know it's a woman?" I asked.

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"Huh! Take me for a fool, don't you?" he said scornfully, scuffling along unsteadily. "I'm drunk as an owl, but I'm no fool! No. I know it's a woman from the pawin' 'round she does. Bah! Thinks she's playin'. Damn nonsense!" He sat down carefully on the sand by the side of the walk and wagged his head knowingly. I looked cautiously about. No one was in sight. I bent down and untied my shoe.

"Perhaps you could play it better?" I suggested sweetly. His jaw dropped with consternation.

"Play it better! Oh, Lord! She says can I play it better! Can-I-play-it-better? Well, I'll tell you one thing. If I couldn't play it better, d'ye know what I'd do? Do you?"

"No," said I, and tied my shoe. He didn't talk thickly as they do in books. On the contrary, he brought out each word with a particularly clear and final utterance.

"Well, I'll tell you what I'd do. I'd go off and drown my sorrers in drink! Yes, I would. Although I'm so drunk that I wouldn't know when I was

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getting drunk on principle and when I was just plain drunk. Le' me tell you somethin': *I'm drunk now!*" He announced the fact with a gravity so colossal as to render laughter impossible. I untied the other shoe.

"Can you really play Chopin?" I said. He shook his fist at the Avery cottage.

"What I can't play of Chopin you never heard played! So that's the end o' that," he said. The folly of the situation suddenly became clear to me. I hastily tied my shoe and turned to go. He half rose from the sand, but sank helplessly back.

"Look here," he said confidentially, "I'm tired, and I need m' rest. I got to have rest. We all need rest. If you want to hear me play, you come to the old hulk of a barn that's got the piano in it. They call it the auditorium—au-di-to-ri-um." He pronounced the syllables as if to a child of three. "I'll be there. You come before supper. I'll be rested then. I'd like to shoot that woman—thinks she can play—damn nonsense—" I went on to the beach.

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II

My brother-in-law came down on the afternoon boat, and of course he occupied our attention. His theories, though often absurd, are certainly well sustained. For instance, his ideas as to the connection between genius and insanity. He says—but I don't know why I speak of it. I defeated him utterly. At length I left the room. I hate a man who won't give up when he's beaten. I found the Nice Boy on the piazza, and we sat and talked. Really a charming fellow. And not so very young, either. He told fascinating tales of a shipwreck he'd experienced, where they sat on the bow as the boat went down and traded sandwiches.

"I gave Hunter two hams for a chicken, and it was a mean swindle!" he said reminiscently. "Speaking of sandwiches, I gave a chap ten cents to buy one this afternoon. Awfully seedy looking. Shabby clothes, stubbly beard, dirty hands, not half sober, and what do you think he said?" I remembered and blushed.

"I don't know," I murmured.

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"He invited me to a recital—a piano recital! He said he was going to play at five-thirty in the auditorium, and I might come if I liked, though it was a private affair! How is that for nerve? He didn't look up to a hand organ."

My curiosity grew. And then, I had a great consciousness of not liking to disappoint even a drunken man. He evidently thought I was coming. I sketched lightly to the Nice Boy the affair of the morning. He was not shocked. He was amused. But my brother-in-law says that nothing I could say could shock the Nice Boy. In fact, he says, that if I mean nothing serious, I have no business to let the Nice Boy think—but that is a digression. It is one of my brother-in-law's prerogatives to be as impertinent as he cares to be.

"Shall we go over?" said I. "He is very probably an accompanist, stranded here, with his engagement ended. Perhaps he even plays well. These things happen in books." The Nice Boy shook his head.

"We'll go, by all means," he said, "but don't hope. He's not touched a piano this long time."

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So we gathered some shawls and cushions and went over. The building was all dusty and smelled of pine. As we stumbled in, the sound of a piano met us. I own I was a bit excited. For one doubtful second I listened, ready to adore. Then I laughed nervously. We were not people in a book. It was Mendelssohn's "Spring Song," played rather slowly and with a mournful correctness. I could feel the player's fingers thudding down on the keys—one played it so when it was necessary to use the notes. The Nice Boy smiled consolingly.

"Too bad," he whispered. "Shall we go out now?"

"I should like to view the fragments of the idol!" I whispered back. "Let's end the illusion by seeing him!"

So we tip-toed up to the benches, and looked at the platform where the Steinway stood. Twirling on the stool sat a girl of seventeen or so, peering out into the gloom at us. It was very startling. Now I felt that the strain was yet to come. As I sank into one of the chairs a man

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rose slowly from a seat under the platform. It was the stranger. He nodded jauntily at us.

"Good thing you come," he announced cheerfully. "I don't know how long I could stand that girl. I guess she's related to the other," and he shambled up the steps. His unsteady walk, his shaking hand, as he clumsily pushed the chairs out of the way, told their disagreeable story. He walked straight up to the girl, and looking beyond her, said easily, "Excuse me, miss, but I'm goin' to play a little for some friends o' mine, an' I'll have to ask you to quit for a while." The girl looked undecidedly from him to us, but we had nothing to say.

"Come, come," he added impatiently, "you can bang all you want in a few minutes, with nobody to disturb you. Jus' now I'm goin' to do my own turn."

His assurance was so perfect, his intention to command obedience so evident, that the child got up and went slowly down the stairs, more curious than angry. The man swept the music from the rack, and lifted the top of the piano to its full

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height. Then with an impatient twitch he spun the music-stool a few inches lower, and pulled it out. The Nice Boy leaned over to me.

"The preparations are imposing, anyhow," he whispered. But I did not laugh. I felt nervous. To be disappointed again would be too cruel! I watched the soiled, untidy figure collapse onto the stool. Then I shut my eyes, to hear without prejudice of sight the opening triple-octave scale of the professional pianist. For with such assurance as he showed he should at least be able to play the scales.

The hall seemed so large and dim, I was so alone—I was glad of the Nice Boy. Suppose it should all be a horrible plot, and the tramp should rush down with a revolver? Suppose—and then I stopped thinking. For from far-away somewhere came the softest, sweetest song. A woman was singing. Nearer and nearer she came, over the hills, in the lovely early morning; louder and louder she sang—and it was the "Spring Song"! Now she was with us—young, clear-eyed, happy, bursting into delicious flights of laughter between the bars.

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Her eyes, I know, were grey. She did not run or leap—she came steadily on, with a swift, strong, swaying, lilting motion. She was all odorous of the morning, all vocal with the spring. Her voice laughed even while she sang, and the perfect, smooth succession of the separate sounds was unlike any effect I have ever heard. Now she passed —she was gone by. Softer, fainter, ah, she was gone! No, she turned her head, tossed us flowers, and sang again, turned, and singing, left us. One moment of soft echo—and then it was still.

I breathed—for the first time since I heard her, I thought. I opened my eyes. It was all black before them, they had been closed so long. I did not dare look at the Nice Boy. There was absolutely nothing for him to say, but I was afraid he would try to say it. He was staring at the platform. His mouth was open, his eyes very large. Without turning his face towards me, he said solemnly, "And I gave him ten cents for a sandwich! Ten cents for a sandwich!"

Suddenly I heard sobs—heavy, awkward sobs. I looked behind me. The girl had dropped for-

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ward on to the chair in front and was hysterically chattering into her handkerchief.

"*I* played that! *I* played that!" she wailed. "Oh, he heard me! he did, he did!" I felt horribly ashamed for her. How she must feel! A child can suffer so.

But the man at the piano gave a little chuckle of satisfaction, and ran his hands up and down the keys in a delirium of scales and arpeggios. Then he hit heavily a deep, low note. It was like a great, bass trumpet. A crashing chord: and then the love-song of Germany and musicians caught me up to heaven, or wherever people go who love that tune—perhaps it is to Germany—and I heard a great, magnificent man singing in a great, magnificent baritone, the song that won Clara Schumann's heart.

Schubert sang sweetly, wonderfully. I cry like a baby when one sings the Serenade even fairly well. And dear Franz Abt has made most loving melodies. But they were musicians singing, this was a man. "*Du meine Liebe, du!*"—that was no piano; it was a voice. And yet no human voice

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could be at once so limpid and so rich, so thrilling and so clear. And now it crashed out in chords—heavy, broken harmony. All the rapture of possession, the very absolute of human joy were there—but these are words, and that was love and music.

I don't in the least know how long it lasted. There was no time for me. The god at the piano repeated it again and again, I think, as it is never repeated in the singing, and always should be. I know that the tears rolled over my cheeks and dropped into my lap. I have a vague remembrance of the Nice Boy's enthusiastically and brokenly begging me to marry him to-night and go to Venice with him to-morrow, and my ecstatically consenting to that or anything else. I am sure he held my hand during that period, for the rings cut in so the next day. And I think—indeed I am quite certain—but why consider one's self responsible for such things? At any rate, it has never happened since.

And when it was over we went up hand in hand, and the Nice Boy said, "What—what is your—your name?" And I stared at him, expecting to

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see his dirty clothes drop off, and his trailing clouds of glory wrap him 'round before he vanished from our eyes. His heavy eyebrows bent together. His knees shook the piano-stool. He was labouring under an intense excitement. But I think he was pleased at our faces.

"What—what the devil does it matter to you what I'm named?" he said roughly.

"Oh, it doesn't matter at all, not at all," I said meekly; "only we wanted, we wanted——" And then, like that chit of seventeen, I cried, too. I am such a fool about music.

"Now you know what I mean when I say I can play," he growled savagely. He seemed really terribly excited, even angry. "I'll play one thing more. Then you go home. When I think o' what I might have done, great God, I *can't* die till I've shown 'em! Can I? Can I die? You hear me! You see"—his face was livid. His eyes gleamed like coals. I ought to have been afraid, but I wasn't.

"You shall show them!" I gasped. "You shall! Will you play for the hotel? We can fill this place for you. We can——"

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"Oh, you shut up!" he snarled. "You! I've played to thousands, I have. You don't know anything about it. It's this devil's drink that's killin' me. It ruined me in Vienna. It spoiled the whole thing in Paris. It's goin' to kill me." His voice rose to a shriek. He dropped from the stool, and from his pocket fell a bottle. The Nice Boy gave a queer little sob.

"Oh, it's dreadful, dreadful!" he whispered to himself. He jumped up on the platform and seized the man's shoulder.

"Come, come," he said. "We'll help you. Come, be a man! You stay here with us, and we'll take care of you. Such a gift as yours shall not go for nothing. Come over to the hotel, and I'll get you a bed."

The man staggered up. He was much older than I had thought. There were deep, disagreeable lines in his face. There was a coarseness, too —but, oh, that "Spring Song"! Now, how can that be? My brother-in-law says—but this is not his story. The man got onto the seat somehow.

"You're a decent fellow," he said. "When I've

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done playing, you go out. Right straight out. D'ye hear? I'll come see you to-morrow morning."

Then he shut his eyes and felt for the keys, and played the Chopin Berceuse. And it is an actual fact that I wanted to die then. Not suddenly—but just to be rocked into rest, rocked into rest, and not wake up any more. It was the purest, sweetest, most inexpressibly touching thing I ever heard. I felt so young—so trustful, somehow. I knew that no harm would come. And then it sang itself to sleep, and we went away and left him, with his head resting on his hands that still pressed the keys. And we never spoke. I think the girl came out with us, but I'm not sure.

At the door the Nice Boy gulped, and said in a queer, shaky voice, "I'm not nearly good enough to have sat by you—I know that—you seem so far away—but I want to tell you." And I said that he was much better than I—that none of us were good —that I thought it would be all right in the end —that after all it was being managed better than we could arrange it—that perhaps heaven

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was more like what we used to think than what we think now. There is no knowing what we might have said if my brother-in-law had not come down to see where I was. And then I went to sleep like a baby.

III

I SHOULD like to end the story here. I should like to leave him bowed over the keys and remember only the most exquisite experience of my life in connection with him. But there is the rest of the tale, and it really needs telling.

I didn't see the end. The Nice Boy and my brother-in-law saw that, and I only know as much as they will tell me. The Nice Boy went over and got him the next morning. He said his name was Decker. He said that he had spent the night in the solemnest watching and praying, and he had held the bottle in his hands and never touched a drop of it. They gave him a bath and clothes, and fed him steadily for two days. He grew fat before our eyes. He looked nicer, more respectable, but

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more commonplace. He refused to touch the piano, because it gave him such a craving for drink.

He hated to talk about himself. But he let slip occasional remarks about London and Paris and Vienna and Leipsic that took away one's breath. He must have known strange people. Once he told me a little story about Clara Schumann that implied more than acquaintance, and he quoted Liszt constantly. He was an American beyond a doubt, we thought. He spoke vaguely of a secret that even Liszt had missed. I guessed it was connected with that wonderful singing quality that made the instrument a human voice under his fingers. When I asked him about it he laughed.

"You wait," he said confidently. "You just wait. I'll show you people something to make you open your eyes. I know. You're a good audience, you and your friend. You make a good air to play in. You just wait."

And I have waited. But never again shall I hear that lovely girl sing across the hills. Never again will my heart grow big, and ache and melt, and

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slip away to that song, "Du, Meine Leibe, Du." Oh, it was not of this earth, that music. Perhaps when I die I shall hear the Berceuse echo—I think it may be so.

Well, we got them all together. There must have been a thousand. They came from across the bay and all along the inlet. The piano was tuned, and the people were seated, and I was just where we were that night, and Mr. Decker was walking behind the little curtain in a new dress-suit. He had shaken hands with me just before. His hands were cold as ice and they trembled in mine. I congratulated him on the presence of Herr H—— from Leipsic, who had been miraculously discovered just across the bay; and Mr. J—— of New York, who could place him musically in the most desirable fashion; and asked him not to forget me, his first audience, and his most sincere friend and admirer.

In his eyes I could swear I saw fright. Not nervousness, not stage fear, but sheer, appalling terror. It could not be, I thought, and my brother-in-law told me to go down. Then he stepped to

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the front and told them all how pleased, how proud and delighted he was to be the means of introducing to them one whom he confidently trusted would leave this stage to-night one of the recognised pianists of the world. He described briefly the man's extraordinary effect upon two of his friends, who were not, he was good enough to say, likely to be mistaken in their musical estimates. He hoped that they all appreciated their good fortune in being the first people in this part of the world to hear Mr. Decker, and he took great pleasure in introducing him.

At this point Mr. Decker should have come forward. As he did not, my brother-in-law stepped back to get him. He found the Nice Boy alone in the room behind the stage, looking distinctly nervous. He explained that Mr. Decker had gone out for a moment to get the air—he was naturally a bit excited, and the room was close. My brother-in-law said nothing, and they waited a few minutes in strained silence. Finally they walked about the room looking at each other.

"Do you think it was quite wise to let him go?"

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said my brother-in-law, with compressed lips. The Nice Boy is horribly afraid of my brother-in-law.

"I'll — I'll go out and — and get him," he gasped, and dashed out into the dark, cursing himself for a fool. This was unfortunate, for in five seconds more Mr. Decker had reeled into the room. He explained in a very thick voice that he had never been able to play without the drink; that a little brandy set his fingers free, but that he had taken too much and must rest.

When the Nice Boy got back—he had brought two great pails of cold water and a fresh dress-shirt—it was too late. The man lay in a heap on the floor, and my brother-in-law stood, white and raging, talking to the heap. The man was drunkenly, horribly asleep. The Boy said that the worst five minutes he ever spent were those in which he poured water over the heap on the floor and shook it, my brother-in-law watching with an absolutely indescribable expression!

Then he got out on the platform and said something. Mr. Decker had met with an accident—would some one get a doctor?—was there perhaps

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a doctor in the audience?—they could realise his position—and more of that sort.

I knew well enough. When the doctor went in he found the Boy shaking the drunken brute on the floor, and they told the doctor all about it, and then went out by the other door. And they got a carriage and took Decker to the hotel.

I don't know—it seemed not wholly his fault. And his face showed that he had suffered. But the men would hear nothing of that. My brother-in-law says that for a woman who is really as hard as nails I have more apparent and æsthetic sympathy than any one he ever knew. And that may be so.

The people took it very nicely. They cleared the floor, and the younger ones danced and the older ones talked, and the manager sent over ices and coffee, and it turned out the affair of the season. And they were all very grateful to my brother-in-law and his friend, and quite forgot about the strange artist.

Whether he ever fully realised what the evening had been we never knew, because when they

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went in the next morning to see how he was, they found him dead. The doctor said that the excitement, the terror, the sudden cutting off of liquor, with the sudden wild drinking, were too much for an overstrained heart, and that he had probably died soon after he was carried to his room.

It seemed to me a little sad that while they were dancing, the man whom they had come to see——. But my brother-in-law says that I turn to the morbid view of things, and that that was the very blessing of the whole affair — that the crowd should have been so pleased, and that the horrible situation should have ended so smoothly. Because such a man is better dead, he says. And of course he is right. Life would be horrible to him, one can see.

But I have noticed that the Nice Boy and the girl who heard him play do not feel so sure that his death was best. For myself, I shall always feel that the world has lost its musical master. I have heard the music-makers of two generations, and not one of them has excelled his exquisite light-

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ness and force of touch, and that wonderful singing stress—oh! I could cry to think of it! And when we go abroad next I shall find out the name of the man who played in Leipsic and Paris and Vienna—for he must have played there once; he said he had played to thousands—and see if any one there has heard of his secret, his wonderful singing through the keys.

For, though my brother-in-law says that the musical temperament in combination with a Bohemian tendency gives an emotional basis which is absolutely unsafe and therefore untrustworthy in its reports of actual facts, I know that the most glorious music of my life gained nothing from my imagination. For there were three of us who saw the spring come over the hills that night. Three of us heard the triumph-song of love incarnate, and thrilled to it. Three of us knew for once a peace that passed our understanding, and had the comfort of little children in their mother's arms.

And though it is not true, as my brother-in-law insinuates, that a man need only be able to play

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my soul away in order to be ranked by me among the angels, I shall continue to insist that somewhere, somehow, the beautiful sounds he made are accounted to him for just a little righteousness!

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A WIND FLOWER

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A WIND FLOWER

I

WILLARD'S landlady smiled sympathetically across the narrow breakfast-table. "I guess you've got to stay in this mornin', Mr. Willard," she said. "It's a good deal too raw and cold for you to be out around, paintin', to-day."

Willard nodded. "Quite right, Mrs. Storrs," he returned, and he smiled at his landlady's daughter, who sat opposite. But she did not smile at him. She continued her silent meal, looking for the most part at her plate, and replying to direct questions only by monosyllables.

She must be nineteen or twenty, he decided, but her slender, curveless figure might have been that of a girl several years younger. Her face was absolutely without character to the casual glance —pale, slightly freckled, lighted by grey-green, half-closed eyes, and framed in light brown hair. Her lips were thin, and her rare smile did not dis-

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close her teeth. Even her direct look, when he compelled it, was quite uninterested.

Her mother chattered with volubility of a woman left much alone, and glad of an appreciative listener, but the girl had not, of her own accord, spoken a word during his week's stay. He wondered as he thought of it why he had not noticed it before, and decided that her silence was not obtrusive, but only the outcome of her colourless personality—like the silence of the prim New England house itself.

He groaned inwardly. "What in time *can* I do? Nothing to read within five miles: my last cigar gone yesterday: this beastly weather driving me to melancholia! If she weren't such a stick—heavens! I never knew a girl could be so thin!"

The girl in question rose and began clearing the table. Her mother bustled out of the room, and left Willard in the old-fashioned arm-chair by the window, almost interested, as he wondered what the girl would do or say now. After five minutes of silence he realised the strange impression, or rather the lack of impression, she made on him. He was

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hardly conscious of a woman's presence. The intangible atmosphere of femininity that wraps around a *tête-à-tête* with even the most unattractive woman was wholly lacking. She seemed simply a more or less intelligent human being.

Given greatly to analysis, he grew interested. Why was this? She was not wanting intellectually, he was sure. Such remarks as she had made in answer to his own were not noticeable for stupidity or even stolidity of thought. He broke the silence.

"What do you do with yourself, these days?" he suggested. "I don't see you about at all. Are you reading, or walking about these fascinating Maine beaches?"

She did not even look up at him as she replied. "I don't know as I do very much of anything. I'm not very fond of reading—at least, not these books."

Remembering the "Pilgrim's Progress," "Book of Martyrs," "Mrs. Heman's Poems," and the "Adventures of Rev. James Hogan, Missionary to the Heathen of Africa," that adorned the

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marble-topped table in the parlour, he shuddered sympathetically.

"But I walk a good deal," she volunteered. "I've been all over that ledge you're painting."

"Isn't it beautiful?" he said. "It reminds me of a poem I read somewhere about the beauty of Appledore—that's on this coast somewhere, too, isn't it? You'd appreciate the poem, I'm sure—do you care for poetry?"

She piled the dishes on a tray, and carried it through the door before he had time to take it from her.

"No," she replied over her shoulder, "no, I don't care for it. It seems so—so smooth and shiny, somehow."

"Smooth? shiny?" he smiled as she came back, "I don't see."

Her high, rather indifferent voice fell in a slight embarrassment, as she explained: "Oh, I mean the rhymes and the verses—they're so even and like a clock ticking."

He took from his pocket a little red book. "Let me read you this," he said eagerly, "and see if

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you think it smooth and shiny. You must have heard and seen what this man tries to tell."

She stood awkwardly by the table, her scant, shapeless dress accentuating the straight lines of her slim figure, her hands clasped loosely before her, her face turned toward the window, which rattled now and then at the gusts of the rising wind. Willard held the little book easily between thumb and finger, and read in clear, pleasant tones, looking at her occasionally with interest:

"Fresh from his fastnesses, wholesome and spacious,
The north wind, the mad huntsman, halloos on his white hounds
Over the gray, roaring reaches and ridges,
The forest of Ocean, the chase of the world.
Hark to the peal of the pack in full cry,
As he thongs them before him, swarming voluminous,
Weltering, wide-wallowing, till in a ruining
Chaos of energy, hurled on their quarry,
They crash into foam!"

"There! is that smooth and shiny?" he demanded. She had moved nearer, to catch more certainly his least intonation.

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Her hands twisted nervously, and to his surprise she smiled with unmistakable pleasure.

"Oh, no!" she half whispered, eyeing the book in his hand wistfully. "Oh, no! That makes me feel different. I—I love the wind."

"What's that?" Mrs. Storrs entered quickly. "Now, Sarah, you just stop that nonsense! Mr. Willard, has she been tellin' you any foolishness?"

"Miss Storrs had only told me that she liked the wind," he replied, hoping that the woman would go, and let him develop at leisure what promised to be a most interesting situation. She had really very pretty, even teeth, and when she smiled her lips curved pleasantly.

But Mrs. Storrs was not to be evaded. She had evidently a grievance to set forth, and looking reproachfully at her daughter, continued:

"Ever since Sarah was five or six years old she's had that crazy likin' for the wind. 'Tain't natural, I say, and when the gales that we hev up here strike us, the least anybody can do 's to stay in the house and thank Providence they've got a house to stay

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in! Why, Mr. Willard, you'd never think it to look at her, for she's a real quiet girl—too quiet, seems to me, sometimes, when I'm just put to it for somebody to be social with—but in thet big gale of eighty-eight she was out all night in it, and me and her father—that was before Mr. Storrs died—nearly crazy with fearin' she was lost for good. And when she was six years old, she got up from her crib and went out on the beach in her little nightgown, and nothin' else, and it's a miracle she didn't die of pneumonia, if not of bein' blown to death."

Mrs. Storrs stopped for breath, and Willard glanced at the girl, wondering if she would appear disconcerted or angry at such unlooked-for revelation of her eccentricity; but her face had settled into its usual impassive lines, and she dusted the chairs serenely, turning now and then to look fixedly through the window at the swaying elm whose boughs leaned to the ground under the still rising wind.

Her mother was evidently relieving the strain of an enforced silence, and sitting stiffly in her

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chair, as one not accustomed to the luxury of idle conversation, she continued:

"And even now, when she's old enough to know better, you'd think, she acts possessed. Any windstorm 'll set her off, but when the spring gales come, she'll just roam 'round the house, back and forth, staring out of doors, and me as nervous as a cat all the while. Just because I won't let her go out she acts like a child. Why, last year I had to go out and drag her in by main force; I was nearly blown off the cliff gettin' her home. And she was singin', calm, as if she was in her bed like any decent person! It's the most unnatural thing I ever heard of! Now, Sarah Storrs," as the girl was slipping from the room, "you remember you promised me not to go out this year after supper, if the wind was high. You mind, now! It's comin' up an awful blow."

The girl turned abruptly. "I never promised you that, mother," she said quickly. "I said I wouldn't if I could help it, and if I can't help it, I can't, and that's all there is to it." The door

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closed behind her, and shortly afterwards Willard left Mrs. Storrs in possession of the room.

The day affected him strangely. The steady low moan of the wind was by this time very noticeable. It was not cold, only clear and rather keen, and the scurrying grey clouds looked chillier than one found the air on going out. The boom of the surf carried a sinister threat with it, and the birds drove helplessly with the wind-current, as if escaping some dreaded thing behind them.

Indoors, the state of affairs was not much better: Mrs. Storrs looked injured; her sister, a lady of uncertain years and temper, talked of sudden deaths, and the probability of premature burial, pointed by the relation of actual occurrences of that nature; Sarah was not to be seen. At last he could bear idleness no longer, and opening the dusty melodeon, tried to drown the dreary minor music of the wind by some cheerful selection from the hymn-book Mrs. Storrs brought him, having a vague idea that secular music was out of keeping with the character of that instrument. After a few moments' aimless fingering the keys he found

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himself pedalling a laborious accompaniment to the "Dead March" from Saul, and closed the wheezy little organ in despair.

The long day dragged somehow by, and at supper Sarah appeared, if anything, whiter and more uninteresting than ever, only to retire immediately when the meal was over.

"I might's well tell you, Mr. Willard, that you c'n give up all hope of paintin' any more this week," announced Mrs. Storrs, as the door closed behind her daughter. "This wind's good for a week, I guess. I'm sorry to have you go, but I shouldn't feel honest not to tell you." Mentally vowing to leave the next morning, Willard thanked her, and explained that the study was far enough advanced to be completed at his studio in the city, and that he had intended leaving very shortly.

II

A FEW moments later, as he stood at the window in the parlour, looking at the waving elm-boughs and lazily wondering how the moon could be so bright when there were so many clouds, the soft

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swish of a woman's skirt sounded close to his ear. As he turned, the frightened "Oh!" and the little gasp of surprised femininity revealed Sarah, standing near the table in the centre of the room. Even at that distance and in the dark he was aware of a difference in her, a subtle element of personality not present before.

"Did I frighten you?" he asked, coming nearer.

"No, not very much. Only I thought nobody would be here. I—I—wanted some place to breathe in; it seems so tight and close in the house." As she spoke, a violent blast of wind drove the shutters against the side of the house and rubbed together the branches of the elm until they creaked dismally. She pressed her face against the glass and stared out into the dark.

"Don't you love it?" she questioned, almost eagerly.

Willard shook his head dubiously. "Don't know. Looks pretty cool. If it gets much higher, I shouldn't care to walk far."

She took her old place by the table again, but soon left it, and wandered restlessly about the

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room. As she passed him he was conscious of a distinct physical impression—a kind of electric presence. She seemed to gather and hold about her all the faint light of the cold room, and the sweep of her skirt against his foot seemed to draw him toward her. Suddenly she stopped her irregular march.

"Hear it sing!" she whispered.

The now distinct voice of the wind grew to a long, minor wail, that rose and fell with rhythmic regularity. As she paused with uplifted finger near him, Willard felt with amazement a compelling force, a personality more intense, for the time, than his own. Then, as the blast, with a shriek that echoed for a moment with startling distinctness from every side, dashed the elm branches against the house itself, she turned abruptly and left the room. "Stay here!" she said shortly, and, resisting the impulse to follow her, he obeyed. In a few moments she returned with a heavy shawl wrapped over her head and shoulders.

"Hold the window open for me," she said, "I'm going out." He attempted remonstrance, but she

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waved him impatiently away. "I can't get out of the door—mother's locked it and taken the key, but you can hold up the window while I get out. Oh, come yourself, if you like! But nothing can happen to me."

Mechanically he held open the window as she slipped out, and, dragging his overcoat after him, scrambled through himself. She was waiting for him at the corner of the house, and as he stumbled in the unfamiliar shadows, held out her hand.

"Here, take hold of my hand," she commanded. Her cool, slim grasp was strangely pleasant, as she hurried along with a smooth, gliding motion, wholly unlike her indifferent gait of the day before.

Once out of the shelter of the house, the storm struck them with full force, and Willard realised that he was well-nigh strangled in the clutches of a genuine Maine gale.

"What folly!" he gasped, crowding his hat over his eyes and struggling to gain his wonted consciousness of superiority. "Come back instantly, Miss Storrs! Your mother——"

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"Come! come!" she interrupted, pulling him along.

He stared at her in amazement. Her eyes were wide open and almost black with excitement. Her face gleamed like ivory in the cold light. Her lips were parted and curved in a happy smile. Her slender body swayed easily with the wind that nearly bent Willard double. She seemed unreal —a phantom of the storm, a veritable wind-spirit. Her loosened hair flew across his face, and its touch completed the strange thrill that her hand-clasp brought. He followed unresistingly.

"Aren't—you—afraid—of—the—woods?" he gasped, the gusts tearing the words from his lips, as he saw that she was making for the thick growth of trees that bordered the cliff. Her high, light laughter almost frightened him, so weird and unhuman it came to him on the wind.

"Why should I be afraid? The woods are so beautiful in a storm! They bow and nod and throw their branches about—oh, they're best of all, then!"

A sweeping blast nearly threw him down, and

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he instinctively dropped her hand, since there was no possible feeling of protection for her, her footing was so sure, her balance so perfect. As he righted himself and staggered to the shelter of the tree under which she was standing, he stopped, lost in wonder and admiration. She had impatiently thrown off the shawl and stood in a gleam of moonlight under the tree. Her long, straight hair flew out in two fluttering wisps at either side; her straight, fine brows, her dark, long lashes, her slender, curved mouth were painted against her pale face in clear relief. Her eyes were widely open, the pupils dark and gleaming. It seemed to his excited glance that rays of light streamed from them to him. "Heavens! she's a beauty! If only I could catch that pose!" he said under his breath.

"Come!" she called to him again, "we're wasting time! I want to get to the cliff!" He pressed on to her, but she slipped around the tree and eluded him, keeping a little in advance as he panted on, fighting with all the force of a fairly powerful man against the gale that seemed to

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offer her no resistance. It occurred to him, as he watched with a greedy artist's eye the almost unnatural ease and lightness of her walk, that she caught intuitively the turns of the wind, guiding along currents and channels unknown to him, for she seemed with it always, never against it. Once she threw out both her arms in an abandon of delight, and actually leaned on the gust that tossed him against a tree, baffled and wearied with his efforts to keep pace with her, and confusedly wondering if he would wake soon from this improbable dream.

Speech was impossible. The whistling of the wind alone was deafening, and his voice was blown in twenty directions when he attempted to call her. Small twigs lashed his face, slippery boughs glided from his grasp, and the trees fled by in a thick-grown crowd to his dazed eyes. To his right, a birch suddenly fell with a snapping crash. He leaped to one side, only to feel about his face a blinding storm of pattering acorns from the great oak that with a rending sigh and swish tottered through the air at his left.

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"Good God!" he cried in terror, as he saw her standing apparently in its track. A veer in the gale altered the direction of the great trunk, that sank to the ground across her path. As it fell, with an indescribable, swaying bound she leaped from the ground, and before it quite touched the earth she rested lightly upon it. She seemed absolutely unreal—a dryad of the windy wood. All fear for her left him. As she stood poised on the still trembling trunk, a quick gust blew out her skirt to a bubble on one side, and drove it close to her slender body on the other, while her loose hair streamed like a banner along the wind. She curved her figure towards him and made a cup of one hand, laying it beside her opened lips. What she said he did not hear. He was rapt in delighted wonder at the consummate grace of her attitude, the perfect poise of her body. She was a figure in a Greek frieze — a bas-relief — a breathing statue.

Unable to make him hear, she turned slightly and pointed ahead. He realised the effect of the Wingless Victory in its unbroken beauty. She was

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not a woman, but an incarnate art, a miracle of changing line and curve, a ceaseless inspiration.

Suddenly he heard the pound and boom of the surf. In an ecstasy of impatience she hurried back, seized his hand, and fairly dragged him on. The crash of the waves and the wind together took from him all power of connected thought. He clung to her hand like a child, and when she threw herself down on her face to breathe, he grasped her dress and panted in her ear: "We—can't—get —much — farther — unless — you — can — walk — the — Atlantic!" She smiled happily back at him, and the thickness of her hair, blown by the wind from the ocean about his face, brought him a strange, unspeakable content.

"Shall we ever go back?" he whispered, half to himself. "Or will you float down the cliff and wake me by your going?"

Her wide, dark eyes answered him silently. "It *is* like a dream, though," her high, sweet voice added. And then he realised that she had hardly spoken since they left the house. The house? As

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in a dream he tried vaguely to connect this Undine of the wood with the girl whose body she had stolen for this night's pranks. As in a dream he rose and followed her back, through the howling, sweeping wind. Her cold, slim hand held his; her light, shrill voice sang little snatches of songs—hymns, he remembered afterward. As the moonlight fell on her, he wondered dreamily why he had thought her too thin. And all the while he fought, half-unconsciously, the resistless gale, that spared him only when he yielded utterly.

The house gleamed white and square before them. Silently he raised the window for her. He had no thought of lifting her in. That she should slip lightly through was of course. The house was still lighted, and he heard the creaking of her mother's rocking-chair in the bedroom over his head. He looked at his watch. "Does her mother rock all night?" he thought dully, for it was nearly twelve. She read his question from the perplexed glance he threw at her.

"She's sitting up to watch the door so that I sha'n't get out," she whispered quietly, without

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a smile. "Good-bye." And he stood alone in the room.

Until late the next morning he wandered in strange, wearied, yet fascinating dreams with her. Vague sounds, as of high-pitched reproaches and quiet sobbing, mingled with his morning dreams, and when, with aching head and thoroughly bewildered brain, he went to his late breakfast, Mrs. Storrs served him; only as he left for the train, possessed by a longing for the great, busy city of his daily work, did he see her daughter, walking listlessly about the house. Her freckled face was paler than ever, her half-closed eyes reddened, and her slight, awkward bow in recognition of his puzzled salute might have been directed to some one behind him. Only his aching head and wearied feet assured him that the strangest night of his life had been no dream.

III

THAT his studio should seem bare and uninteresting as he threw open the door, and tried to kindle a fire in the dusty stove, did not surprise

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him. That the sketches and studies in colour should look tame and flat to the eye that had been fed for two weeks with Maine surf, angry clouds, and swaying branches, was perhaps only natural. But as the days went on and he failed to get in train for work a puzzled wonder slowly grew in him. Why was it that the picture dragged so? He remembered perfectly the look of the beach, the feel of the cold, hungry water, the heavy, grey clouds, the primitive, forbidding austerity that a while ago he had been so confidently eager to put on the canvas. Why was it that he sat for hours together helplessly staring at it? His friends supposed him wrapped in his subject, working under a high pressure, and considerately left him alone; they would have marvelled greatly had they seen him glowering moodily at the merest study of the subject he had described so vividly to them, smoking countless packages of cigarettes, hardly lifting his hand from his chair-arm.

Once he threw down a handful of brushes and started out for a tramp. It occurred to him that the city sights and smells, the endless hum and

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roar, the rapid pace of the crowded streets would tone him up and set his thoughts in a new line; he was tired of the whistling gales and tossing trunks and booming surf that haunted his nights and confused his days. A block away from the studio a flower-woman met him with a tray of daffodils and late crocuses. A sudden puff of wind blew out her scant, thin skirt; a tree in the centre of the park they were crossing bent to it, the branches creaked faintly. The fresh, earthy odour of the flowers moved him strangely. He bought a bunch, turned, and went back to the studio, to sit for an hour gazing sightlessly ahead of him.

Suddenly he started up and approached the sketch.

"It wants wind," he muttered, half unconsciously, and fell to work. An hour passed, two, three—he still painted rapidly. Just as the light was fading a thunderous knock at the door ushered in the two men he knew best. He nodded vaguely, and they crossed the room in silence and looked at the picture. For a few moments no one spoke.

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Presently Willard took a brush from his mouth and faced them.

"Well?" he said.

The older man shook his head. "Queer sky!" he answered briefly.

The younger looked questioningly at Willard. "You'll have to get a gait on you if you hope to beat Morris with that," he said. "What's up, Willard? Don't you want that prize?"

"Of course I do." His voice sounded dull, even to himself. "You aren't any too sympathetic, you fellows——" he tried to feel injured.

The older man came nearer. "What's that white thing there? Good Lord, Will, you're not going to try a figure——"

Willard brushed rapidly over the shadowy outline. "No—that was just a sketch. The whole thing's just a sort of——"

"The whole thing's just a bluff!" interrupted the younger man, decidedly. "It's not what you told us about at all—and it's not good, anyway. It looks as if a tornado had struck it! You said it was to be late afternoon—it's nearer midnight, as

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far as I can see! What's that tree lying around for?"

His tone was abusive, but a genuine concern and surprise was underneath it. He looked furtively at his older friend behind Willard's back. The other shook his head expressively.

Willard bit his lip. "I only wanted to try—it won't necessarily stay that way," he explained. He wished he cared more for what they said. He wished they did not bore him so unspeakably. More than all, he wished they would go.

The younger one whistled softly. "Pretty late in the day to be making up your mind, I should say," he remarked. "When's it going to dry in? Morris has been working like a horse on his for six weeks. He's coming on, too—splendid colour!"

Willard lit a cigarette. "Damn Morris!" he said casually. The older man drew on his glove and turned to go.

"Oh, certainly!" he replied cheerfully. "By all means! No, we can't stay—we only dropped in. We just thought we'd see how you were getting

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along. If I were you, Will, I'd make up my mind about that intoxicated tree and set it up straight —good-bye!"

They went out cheerfully enough, but he knew they were disappointed and hurt—they had expected so much from that picture. And he wished he cared more. He looked at it critically. Of course it was bad, but how could they tell what he had been doing? It was the plan of months changed utterly in three hours. The result was ridiculous, but he needed it no longer—he knew what he wanted now, what he had been fighting against all these days. He would paint it if he could—and till he could. The insistent artist-passion to express even bunglingly something of the unendurable beauty of that strange night was on him, and before the echo of his guests' departure had died away he was working as he had never worked before, the old picture lying unnoticed in the corner where he had thrown it.

He needed no models, he did not use his studies. Was it not printed on his brain, was it not etched into his heart, that weird vision of the storm, with

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the floating fairy creature that hardly touched the earth? Was there a lovely curve in all her melting postures, which slipped like water circles into new shapes, that he did not know? That haunting, elf-like look, that ineffably exquisite *abandon*, had he not studied it greedily then in the wood, and later, in his restless dreams? The trees were sentient, the bushes put out clasping fingers to detain him, the wind shrieked out its angry soul at him; and she, the white wonder with her floating wisps of stinging hair, had joined with them to mock at him, the startled witness of that mad revel of all the elements. He knew all this—he was drunk with it: could he paint it? Or would people see only a strange-eyed girl dancing in a wood?

He did not know how many days he had been at work on it; he ate what the cleaning-woman brought him; his face was bristled with a stubby growth; the cigarette boxes strewed the floor. Men appeared at the door, and he urged them peevishly to go away; people brought messages, and he said he was not in town, and returned the notes unread. In the morning he smiled and breathed hard and

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patted the easel; at night he bit his nails and cursed himself for a colour-blind fool.

There was a white birch, strained and bent in the wind, that troubled him still, and as he was giving it the last touches, in the cold, strong afternoon light, the door burst open.

"Look here, the thing closes at six! Are you crazy?" they called to him, exasperatedly. "Aren't you going to send it?"

"That's all right, that's all right," he muttered vaguely, "shut up, can't you?"

They stood over behind him, and there was a stillness in the room. He laid down his palette carefully and turned to them, a worried look on his drawn, bristled face.

"That's meant to be the ocean beyond the cliff there," he said, an almost childlike fear in his eyes, "did—did you know it?"

The older man drew in a long breath.

"Lord, yes! I hear it!" he returned, "do you think we're deaf?"

The younger one squinted at various distances, muttering to himself.

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"Dryad? Undine? No, she frightens you, but she's sweet! George! He's painted the wind! He's actually drawn a wind! My, but it's stunning! My!"

Willard sank into a chair. He was flushed and his legs shook. He patted the terrier unsteadily and talked to her. "Well, then! Well, then! So she was, iss, so she was!"

The older man snapped his watch. "Five-thirty," he said. "Put something 'round it, and whistle a cab—we'll have to hurry!"

Willard fingered some dead crocuses on the stand beside him. "Look out, you fool, it's wet!" he growled. The older man patted his shoulder.

"All right, boy, all right!" he said soothingly. "It's all done, now—never mind!"

They shouldered it out of the door while he pulled the terrier's ears.

"Where you going?" they called.

"Turkish bath. Restaurant. Vaudeville," he answered, and they nodded.

"All alone?"

"Yes, thanks. Drop in to-morrow!"

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"——And drive like thunder!" he heard them through the open window.

A week later he was walking up Broadway between them, sniffing the fresh, sweet air comfortably, the terrier at his heels. At intervals they read him bits from the enthusiastic comments of the critics.

"Mr. Willard, whose 'Windflower' distanced all competitors and won the Minot prize by a unanimous verdict of the judges, has displayed, aside from his thorough master of technic, a breadth of atmosphere, an imaginative range rarely if ever equalled by an American. Nothing but the work itself, so manifestly idealistic in subject and treatment, could convince us that it is not a study from life, so keen, so haunting is the impression produced by the remarkable figure of the Spirit of the Gale, who seems to sink before our eyes on the falling trunk, literally riding the storm. In direct contrast to this abandon of the figure is the admirable reticence of the background which is keyed so low——"

Willard stopped abruptly before the window of

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a large art establishment where a photograph of the picture was already displayed. "I want one of those," he said, "and I'm going out into the country for a bit before I sail, I think."

"Oh, back there?" they asked, comprehensively.

"Yes, back there!"

IV

As the train rushed along he explained to himself why he was going—why he had not merely sent the photograph. He wanted to see her, to brush away the cloud of illusion that the weeks had spun around her. He wanted to realise definitely the difference between the pale, silent, unformed New England girl and the fascinating personality of his picture. Ever since he left her they had grown confused, these two that his common sense told him were so different, and he was beginning to dread the unavowed hope that for him, at least, they might be some day one. The same passionate power that had thrown mystery and beauty into colour on the canvas wove sweet,

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wild dreams around what he contemptuously told himself was little better than a lay figure, but he yielded to it now as he had then.

When he told himself that he was going purposely to hear her talk, to see her flat, unlovely figure, to appreciate her utter lack of charm, of all vitality, he realised that it was a cruel errand. But when he felt the sharp thrill that he suffered even in anticipation as his quick imagination pictured the dream-cloud dropping off from her, actually before his eyes, he believed the journey more than ever a necessary one.

As he walked up the little country street his heart beat fast; the greening lawns, the fresh, faint odours, the ageless, unnamable appeal of the spring stirred his blood and thrilled him inexpressibly. He was yet in the first flush of his success; his whole nature was relaxed and sensitive to every joy; he let himself drift on the sweet confused expectancy, the delicious folly, the hope that he was to find his dream, his inspiration, his spirit of the wind and wood.

A child passed him with a great bunch of daf-

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fodils and stopped to watch him long after he had passed, wondering at the silver in her hand.

At the familiar gate a tall, thin woman's figure stopped his heart a second, and as a fitful gust blew out her apron and tossed her shawl over her head, he felt his breath come more quickly.

"Good heavens!" he muttered, "what folly! Am I never to see a woman's skirt blown without——"

She put the shawl back as he neared her—it was Mrs. Storrs's sister. She met his outstretched hand with a blank stare. Suddenly her face twitched convulsively.

"O Mr. Willard! O Mr. Willard!" she cried, and burst into tears.

The wind blew sharper, the elm tree near the window creaked, a dull pain grew in him.

"What is it?" What's the matter?" he said brusquely.

"I suppose you ain't heard—you wouldn't be apt to!" she sobbed, and pushing back the locks the wind drove into her reddened eyes, she broke into incoherent sentences: he heard her as one in a dream.

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"And she would go—'twas the twenty-fifth—there was dozens o' trees blown down—'twas just before dark—her mother, she ran out after her as soon's she knew—she called, but she didn't hear—she saw her on the edge o' the rocks, an' she almost got up to her an' screamed, an' it scared her, we think—she turned 'round quick, an' she went right off the cliff an' her mother saw her go—'twas awful!"

Willard's eyes went beyond her to the woods; the woman's voice, with its high, flat intonation, brought the past so vividly before him that he was unconscious of the actual scene—he lived through the quick, terrible drama with the intensity of a witness of it.

"No, they haven't found her yet—the surf's too high. We always had a feeling she wouldn't live—she wasn't like other girls——"

Half unconsciously he unwrapped the photograph.

"I—I brought this," he said dully. The woman blanched and clutched the gate-post.

"Oh, take it away! Take it away!" she gasped,

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a real terror in her eyes. "O Mr. Willard, how could you—it's awful! I—I wouldn't have her mother see it for all the world!" Her sobs grew uncontrollable.

He bent it slowly across and thrust it in his pocket.

"No, no," he said soothingly, "of course not, of course not. I only wanted to tell—you all—that it took the prize I told you about and—and was a good thing for me. I hoped—I hoped——"

He saw that she was trembling in the sudden cold wind, and held out his hand.

"This has been a great shock to me," he said quietly, his eyes still on the woods. "Please tell Mrs. Storrs how I sympathise—how startled I was. I am going abroad in a few days. I will send you my address, and if there is ever anything I can do, you will gratify me more than you can know by letting me help you in any way. Give her these," and he thrust out the great bunch of daffodils to her. She took them, still crying softly, and turned towards the house.

Later he found himself in the woods near the

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great oak that lay just as it had fallen that night. Beneath all the confused tumult of his thoughts one clear truth rang like a bell, one bitter-sweet certainty that caught him smiling strangely as he realised it! "She's won! She's won!"

There, while the branches swayed above him, and the surf, sinister and monotonous, pounded below, the vision that had made them both famous melted into the elusive reality, and he lived again with absolute abandonment that sweet mad night, he felt again her hair blown about his face as he lay on the windy cliff with the lady of his dreams.

For him her fate was not dreadful—she could not have died like other women. There was an intoxication in her sudden taking away: she was rapt out of life as she would have wished, he knew.

Slowly there grew upon him a frightened wonder if she had lived for this. Her actual life had been so empty, so unreal, so concentrated in those piercing stolen moments; she had ended it, once the heart of it had been caught and fixed to give to others faint thrills of all she had felt so utterly.

"She died for it!" he felt, with a kind of awe

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that was far from all personal vanity—the blameless egoism of the artist.

He left the little town hardly consciously. On his outward voyage, when the gale beat the vessel and the wind howled to the thundering waves, he came to know that though a love more real, a passion less elusive, might one day hold him, there would rest always in his heart and brain one ceaseless inspiration, one strange, sweet memory that nothing could efface.

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WHEN PIPPA PASSED

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WHEN PIPPA PASSED

MR. DELAFIELD, stepping comfortably forth from his club, had dined especially well, and was in a correspondingly good humour. As the brisk March wind swept across the corner just in front of him, he meanwhile settling his glossy hat more firmly on a fine, close-clipped grey head, a sudden kindly impulse, not entirely usual with him, sent him bending to his knee to pick up the fugitive slip of white, scribbled foolscap that fluttered by him, hotly pursued by a slender young man.

"Thanks. Oh, thanks!" murmured the pursuer, as Delafield, with a courteous inclination of the head, tendered the captured slip.

"Not at all." A consciousness of the boy's quick panting, his anxious tug at the paper, actually an almost audible beating of the heart, drew the older man to look carefully at him. A white, oval face, drooping mouth, black, deep-set eyes that fairly burned into his, compelled attention.

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"Important paper, I suppose?" he inquired lightly. "Wouldn't want to lose it."

"No—oh, no!"

"Get a wigging at the office?"

"It—it's not—they are my own—it is a poem!" stammered the young man.

Delafield chuckled involuntarily, and then, as a quick red poured over the other's cheeks, he made a hasty gesture of apology.

"No offence—none at all, I assure you, Mr.—Mr. Poet! I was only taken by surprise. One doesn't often assist a poet in catching his works!" He laughed again, a contented after-dinner laugh.

Then, as the young man fell behind him quietly, the incident being over, an idle desire for company prompted him to delay his own pace.

"Do you write much? Get it printed? Good publisher?" he inquired genially. Few persons could resist Lester Delafield's smile: his very butler warmed to it, and the woman who retained her reserve under it he had never met.

Again the young man blushed. "Published? No,

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sir; I never dared to see—I don't know if it's worth being printed," he said.

"But you think it's pretty good, eh? I'll bet you do. I used to. Let me see it. I'll tell you if it's worth anything."

They had turned into a quieter cross-street; the wind had passed them by. Standing under a street-light, benevolently amused at his impulse, Delafield tucked his stick under his arm, uncreased the paper, and noted the title of the poem aloud: *To the Moon in a Stormy Night.* His eyebrows lifted; he glanced quizzically at the young man, but met such an earnest, searching look, so restrained, yet so quivering, so terrified, yet so brave, that his heart softened and he read on in silence.

A minute passed, two, three, and four. The man read silently, the boy waited breathless in suspense. The noisy, crowding city seemed to sweep by them, leaving them stranded on this little point of time.

Mr. Delafield raised his eyes and regarded the boy thoughtfully.

"You say you wrote this?" he demanded.

"Yes, sir."

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"When did you write it?"

"Last night."

"Have you any more like it?"

"I don't know if it's like it. I've got quite a good deal more. What do you——" He could get no further. Drops of perspiration started from his forehead. His mouth was drawn flat with anxiety.

"This poetry," said Delafield, with a carefully impersonal calm, "is very good. It is remarkably good. It is stunning, in fact. '*And moored at last in some pale bay of dawn*'—why did you stop there? Isn't that rather abrupt?"

"That was when it ended. Do you really think——"

"I don't think anything about it. I know. You have a future before you, my young friend. I should like to see—Good Lord, what is it?"

For the boy had twined his arms around the lamp-post and was slowly sinking to the pavement. His face was ghastly white. Delafield grasped his arm, and as their eyes met, the older man drew a quick breath and scowled.

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"It's not because—you're not—when did you have your lunch?" he demanded shortly.

The boy smiled weakly.

"And your breakfast?"

"Oh, I had *that*—quite a little—really I did!" he half whispered.

Delafield got him on his feet and around the corner to a restaurant. As they entered, the smell of the food weakened him again, and he staggered against his friend, begging his pardon helplessly.

"Soup—and hurry it up, it's immaterial what kind," the host commanded.

As the boy gulped it down he made out a further order, and while the hot meat, vegetables, and bread vanished and the strong, brown coffee lowered in the cup, he lighted a long cigar and talked with a quiet insistence. Later, when his guest blinked drowsily behind a cloud of cigarette smoke, he asked questions, marvelling at the simple replies.

The boy's name was Henry West; it was twenty-two years since he had made his appearance in a family already large enough to regard his advent

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with a stoical endurance. His people all worked in the mills in Lowell; he, too, till the noise and jar gave him racking headaches. He made his first verses in the mill. He had come to New York to learn to be a clerk in a corner drug-store kept by a distant cousin, but he couldn't seem to learn the business. The names of the things were hard to remember. His cousin said he was absent-minded.

And he had to read everything that was in sight: if a thing was printed he seemed to have to read it. He read books from the library and the night-school when his cousin thought he was polishing the soda-fountain. Of all the things he hated—and they were many—the soda-fountain was the worst. He wanted to study a great deal, but only the studies he liked. Not algebra and geometry, nor chemistry that made his head ache, but history and poetry and French. He thought he would like to know Italian, too. The family supposed he was still in the drug-store, but he had quarrelled with his cousin and left it a month ago. He stayed mostly in the library and helped the janitor with sweeping and airing the rooms. The

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janitor paid him a little to ease his own hours of night-watching, and often asked him to supper. He read nearly all day and wrote at night. It was better than the mills or the drug-store. He supposed he was lazy—his family always said he was.

"Come to this address to-morrow afternoon and bring the rest of your poetry with you," said Delafield, "I have an engagement at nine. May I keep this one till you come?"—he shook the foolscap significantly. The boy hesitated, almost imperceptibly, then nodded. As Delafield left the little table he did not rise with him, but sat with his eyes fixed on the smoke-rings.

"They do not teach courtesy in the night-schools, evidently," mused the older man, peering for a cab; "but one can't have everything. My manners have been on occasion commended—but I can't write poetry like that."

He tasted in advance the pleasure of reading the poem to Anne: how her brown eyes would dilate and glow, how eagerly her long, slender fingers would clasp and unclasp. People called her

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cold, they told him; for his part he never could see why. True, she was not kittenish, like the other nieces; she didn't try to flirt with her old uncle, as Ellen's girls did; but what an enthusiasm for fine things, what a quick, keen mind the child had! Child—Anne was twenty-five by now. Was it true that she might never marry? Ellen said—but then Ellen was always a little jealous of poor Anne's money. The girl couldn't help her legacies. Still, at twenty-five—perhaps it was true that she expected too much, thought too seriously, reasoned morbidly that they were after her money.

Seated opposite her in his favourite oak chair, looking with a sudden impersonal appraisal at the slender figure in clinging black lace, the cool pallor of the face under the smooth dark hair, the rope of pearls that hung from her firm, girlish shoulders, it dawned on him that there was something wanting in this not quite sufficiently charming piece of womanhood. She was too black-and-white, too unswerving, too unflushed by life. Humanity, with its countless moulding and colouring touches, seemed to slip away from either side

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of her, like the waves from some proud young prow, and fall behind.

"Yet she's not unsympathetic—I swear she's not!" he thought, as her eyes glowed to the poem and her lips parted delightedly.

"'*And moored at last in some pale bay*'—Uncle Les, isn't that beautiful! Not that it's really so fine as the first part, but it's easier to remember. And he was hungry? Oh, oh! And you discovered him, didn't you?"

He nodded complacently.

"I'll bring you around the rest of the things to-morrow. I knew you'd enjoy this, Anne. You love—really love—this sort of thing, don't you?"

She nodded eagerly.

"But nothing else? Nobody—you don't think that perhaps you're letting—after all, my dear, life is something more than the beautiful things you surround yourself with—pictures and music and poetry, and all that. It really is. There is so much——"

"There is one's religion," she said quietly and not uncordially. But she had retreated intangibly

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from him. She sat there, remote as her cold pearls, as far from the rough, sweet uses of the world as the priceless china in her cabinets.

"Oh, yes, of course, there is religion," he answered listlessly.

Two days later they sat, all three, in her library, while West read them his poems. The two looked at each other in amazement. Where had this untrained factory boy got it all? What wonderful voices had sung to him above the whirring of the wheels; what delicate visions had risen through the smoky pall of his sordid days? He wrote only of Nature: the brown brook water in spring; the pale, hurrying leaves of November; a bird glimpsed through pink apple-blossoms; the full river encircling a bending elm. In the vivid swiftness of effect, the simple subtlety of treatment, there was a recalling of the Japanese witchery of suggestion; the faint tinge of sadness in every poem left in the mind precisely the sweet regret that the beauty of the world must always leave. At the "Clearing Shower," perhaps the most compelling of all his work, quick drops started to the

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girl's eyes, so intense was the vision of the moist, green-breathing earth, the torn fleece of the clouds, the broken chirping of frightened birds, the softened, yellow light that reassures and saddens at once. His art was not Wordsworth's nor Shelley's; it was as if Keats had turned from human passion and consecrated the beauty of his verse to the beauty of Nature—but simply, sadly, and through a veil of Heine's tears.

Delafield nodded mutely to his niece, then walked over to the boy.

"There will be plenty of people to tell you later," he said, holding out his hand, "but let me be the first. You are a genius, Mr. West, and your country will be proud of your work some day. There is no American to-day writing such poetry."

West took his hand awkwardly, not rising from his chair. He fingered his manuscript nervously.

"I—I wouldn't want to be laughed at," he demurred. "Other folks mightn't be so kind as you. If anybody laughed—I—it would just about kill me!" he concluded, passionately. They smiled sympathetically at each other.

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"But no one would laugh, I assure you, Mr. West," Anne murmured, stooping to pick up a scattered sheet.

He hardly noticed her. His eyes were fixed constantly on Delafield: the girl had made no impression upon him whatever. Nor did the elegance of the furnishings, the evidences of great wealth everywhere arouse in him the least apparent curiosity. Having no knowledge of the many grades of material prosperity between his own meagre surroundings and Anne Delafield's luxury, he accepted the one as he had endured the other, his mind quite removed from either, his eyes looking beyond.

Anne had supposed that her uncle would carry the poems to one of the leading magazines, but he pooh-poohed the idea.

"I think not. We're not going to have the boy mixed up with the hacks that turn out two or three inches of rhymes to fill up a page in a magazine," he declared. "We'll have D—— drop in some night and West shall read 'em to him. Then we'll bring out a book. Here and in England

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—they'll like him there, or I'm much mistaken."

In a month it seemed that they had always known him. Intimacy was so impossible with his inturned, elusive nature, that to have him sitting through hours of silence by the birch fire, abstracted, dreamy, inattentive, except to some chance word that stirred his fancy, was to know him well, to all intents. His nerves, dulled to all great torments like poverty, hunger, obscurity, quivered like violin strings under little unaccustomed jarrings. If interrupted in the reading of his verses he would lose his control beyond belief; a chance cough, the falling of an ember, put him out of tune for hours. He possessed little sense of humour, and the lightest satire turned him sulky. A child might have teased him to madness; it was evident to them that his utterly lonely life had preserved him from constant torture at the hands of associates.

Until the book was complete he refused to have the great publisher brought to hear it read. Sometimes for days they would not see him, then on

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some rainy evening he would appear, lonely and hungry, eager for the praise and warmth of Anne's library, an exquisite poem in his pocket. Served to repletion by the secretly scornful butler, he would smoke a while, then draw out the sheet of foolscap, and read in his nervous yet musical voice the latest page of the book that was to bring him fame.

On one such night—it was when he brought them "Dawn on the River," the only poem of which Anne had a copy, and the one which a well-known firm afterward printed under his photograph and sold by thousands at Easter-tide—he broke through the mist—it was too impalpable to be called a wall of reserve—that held his personality apart from them, and talked wonderfully for an hour. They seemed to see the clear soul of some gentle, strayed fawn; his thoughts were like summer clouds mirrored in a placid brook. All the crowding, sweating humanity of his stunted boyhood had flowed through his youth like an ugly drain laid through a fresh mountain stream. He seemed to have lived all his years with young

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David on the hillside, and wealth and poverty, crowds and loneliness, love and death were as far from his life as if the vast procession of them all that swept by him daily through the great city had never been.

As he talked, Delafield found his eyes drawn from the boy's face to Anne's. Never before had he seen just that faint, steady rose in her cheeks, that sweet glow in her eyes. As she leaned forward, her very pearls seemed to catch a red tinge from the fire: it occurred to him for the first time that she looked like Ellen's girls—there was a suggestion of Kitty in the curve of her cheek.

Was it possible that Anne—no, it could not be. To think of the men that had tried to come into her life and failed—such men! And this boy, this elf, to whom no woman was so real or so dear as a tree in the glen!

For two weeks after that night he did not come. Anne never mentioned his name, and Delafield, doubtful of what that might portend, tried to believe that she had forgotten him. Toward the end of the second week she spoke of the completion of

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his book, and suggested that her uncle should invite Mr. D——: "Urge Henry to consent to it," she added, "he will do anything for you, Uncle Les."

"More than for you?" he asked.

"For me?" She flushed a little. "I doubt if he distinguishes me from my portrait over the mantel!"

"And you wish that he would," Delafield wanted to reply, trying to remember if she had ever called him "Henry" before.

On a warm April evening, when the windows were open to catch the setting sun and the odour of the blossoming window-boxes, he came at last. As he stepped into the room, head erect, eyes wide and bright, they became aware immediately of a change in him. His glance was more conscious, more alert, his hand-grasp more assured.

"You are in time to dine with us," Anne said, with her grave smile, "we are all alone. Will you stay?"

"Thanks, I can't stay, I'm going somewhere else," he answered quickly.

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"And the new poem?" Delafield inquired, "did you get it done? That was to be the last, wasn't it?"

"Oh! I haven't been writing lately," he explained, blushing a little. "I've been too busy—that is, I've been too—I've been thinking of something else." He stood before them in the full light of the late day; every expression in his sensitive, mobile face showed clear.

"A perfectly wonderful thing has happened," he burst out, "you couldn't understand. Nobody can understand but me, and—and——"

"Who is she?" said Delafield bluntly.

"How did you know?" cried the boy, "have you seen—did she tell——"

"Of course not. When did it happen?"

Delafield kept his face persistently from Anne's. For the world he could not have looked at her.

"It was last week." West was smiling eagerly at him, ignoring the woman's presence.

"I went into the grocer's to do an errand for Mr. Swazey, and she was behind the little grating—you pay her. She is the cashier. I didn't take

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my change, and she had to call me back, and we dropped it all over the floor. She helped me pick it up. Oh, if you could see her, Mr. Delafield!"

"Is she handsome?"

"She is a perfectly beautiful woman," said the boy.

"Dear, dear!" murmured the older man.

"We are engaged, but her mother objects to me. In fact—in fact, her mother doesn't know that she is engaged. She has been engaged before. But she never really loved the man. Her mother doesn't care for poetry——"

At that word, Delafield, with a distinct effort, connected this babbling druggist's clerk with his poet of "The Clearing Shower." There could be no doubt that they were the same person. As in a dream he listened to the boy.

"And that's what I dropped in to see about. I told her mother all you said about me being sure to be well-off some day, and about the book being published soon, and her brother, that's Pippa's uncle——"

"What name did you say?"

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"Pippa. That's her name. Philippa it is really; she was named after the daughter of a lady her mother nursed when she was sick, and so she named her after this lady's daughter. But she couldn't say it plain, you see, so she always called herself Pippa for short, and so they all call her that still. I suppose you never heard it before—I never did."

"It is a strange name—for a cashier," said Mr. Delafield.

"Yes, indeed. Well, her Uncle Joseph is a stenographer in a newspaper office, and he knows a good deal about this sort of thing, and he says not to publish with the D——s. He says they're a poky firm and don't advertise enough. If I gave the book to the L——s they'd push it along, he says. He says they'd make anything sell. The D——s wouldn't put up posters on bill-boards, now, would they?"

"I suppose not," said Delafield. He felt unaccountably tired. He had not realised till now how much his mind had been filled with Henry West and his poetry, how much he had anticipated introducing his rare young protegé.

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"And of course I want to do the best for myself——"

"Of course, beyond a doubt."

How could a person change so in two weeks? What had turned that sensitive dreamer into this bustling young lover?

"You see, sir, I've got a good many things to consider," he smiled happily.

"Certainly, West, I appreciate that. At the same time I doubt if you will do better with anybody than you can with Mr. D——. It may be the L——s wouldn't want your book. It is not what is known as a popular book, you know. Poetry appeals to a limited public, and——"

"Oh, well, it's all right. Only I thought you might want to know what Uncle Joseph said, that's all. I must go now," and he turned.

"Miss Delafield is still here," said her uncle, coldly.

"Oh, good-night," West murmured, and left the room.

"Is it really he?" Delafield hazarded, hardly glancing at her. She met his look calmly.

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"At any rate the book is ready, which is the principal thing, I suppose," she said.

He found himself illogically wishing she had resented it more. "It was a mistake," he thought, "she has no feeling for him."

Through the weeks that followed they avoided mentioning his name, and each, trusting that the other would forget, thought of him in puzzled silence.

When he came to them next, toward the end of May, it seemed for a moment, as he flung himself into a chair and stared moodily at the empty fireplace, that his old self had returned. Thin and shabby, with dark rings under his eyes, he looked like the boy Delafield had warmed and fed that cold March night. But his words undeceived them.

"I shall shoot myself if this doesn't stop," he said bitterly. Anne started.

"Here, here, West, none of that," the older man corrected, sharply. "That's no thing to say—what is the matter?"

"It's Pippa," he returned, simply. "She won't marry me. I'll kill myself if she don't. I can't eat,

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I can't sleep, I can't think. It cuts into me night and day. You don't know how it kills me—you don't know!"

He writhed like a child in physical pain. His face was distorted: he made no more effort to conceal his misery than his delight of weeks ago. Delafield showed a little of his disgust.

"Come, come, West," he said, "control yourself. This is no killing matter. Better men than you have been thrown over before this. If she won't have you, take it like a man, and get to work. It's time your book was under way."

West stared dully at him.

"Book? book?" he repeated. "Oh, damn the book! I'd throw it away this minute to feel her arms around me! When I think of how we used to sit in Uncle Joseph's hammock—Oh, I can't endure it, I can't!"

He leaned his head on his arms and rocked to and fro in abject misery.

"She laughs at me—just laughs at me!" he moaned. "I'm ashamed to go near them."

"Keep away, then," said Delafield shortly.

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"I can't!" he fairly sobbed.

Anne spoke softly from a dim corner:

"Does she know about the book?"

"She doesn't care anything about it. She says I better be getting a job somewhere. I—I would, if she'd marry me. I'd go to the drug-store!"

"Oh, no!" she breathed.

"If only she'd be engaged again," he muttered, half to himself, "I'd finish the book, and then, perhaps——" He began to rock again. "But she won't, she won't!" he wailed.

"If you will tell me where she lives," said Anne quietly, and as if the conversation were to the last degree conventional, "I will go to see her and talk the matter over. Perhaps she doesn't understand——"

"My dear Anne! Are you mad?"

As Delafield spoke, West interrupted:

"I'd rather Mr. Delafield would go," he said quickly, "if—if he would. Maybe she'd listen to you."

"I will do nothing of the sort," Delafield returned angrily. "As if anything I could say

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could compare with Miss Delafield's words! You are an ungrateful little beast, West. A woman, like Pippa herself, is the best person to understand the matter."

"All right," the boy assented wearily, "only she isn't like Pippa, not a bit. Pippa's different."

Anne coloured deeply, and Delafield cursed the day he met the boy. His niece he did not pretend to understand.

The next afternoon, as he chafed in the stuffy dining-room-parlour of the flat that was Pippa's home, listening to the quarrelling of a half dozen children on the dreary little roof-garden below him as to who should swing in Uncle Joseph's hammock, he understood her less and less. What did she expect to gain from this visit? Was she satisfying her idea of duty or her curiosity? How much did she care, anyhow?

A steady murmur of voices came from a room behind the one he occupied. The afternoon wore on. He began to grow sleepy.

At last the door was flung open. Anne, looking pale and tired, entered the room, followed by a

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large, handsome girl with a heavy rope of auburn hair twisted low over her forehead. She had a frank, vulgar smile, and shallow, red-brown eyes. In her plump, large-limbed beauty she was like a well-kept cat. The day was damp and hot, and her mussed white shirt-waist clung to her broad curve of shoulder and breast. In her eyes, as she smiled at him, was the quiet ease of a conscious beauty. Beside her Anne seemed unimportant.

"I'm sorry about the book, Mr. Delafield," she said, with a slow smile. "But I guess you don't know Henry very well if you think any reasonable girl would think of marrying him for a minute. The gentleman I've been keeping company with some time had a little misunderstanding with me, and 'twas more or less to spite him, I guess, that I got engaged to Henry. It never seemed to me it mattered much either way."

"You have broken his heart," said Delafield stiffly.

She looked vaguely at her short, fat fingers: her hands were like a baby's in shape.

"Oh, I don't know," she said. "He's an awful

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unreasonable fellow, Henry is. He gets into such tantrums—I don't dare tell him about Mr. Winch—that's the gentleman I was speaking of. We're going to be married in the fall. He's in a livery-stable: I guess you probably noticed it as you came along Sixth Avenue—Judd and Winch. He's only junior partner, but he knows as much about running a real swell funeral as any of the uptown men—Mr. Judd says so. Henry's afraid of a horse, you know. It don't seem quite natural for a man not to know about horses, does it, now?"

"If you had only waited till his book came out," said Delafield tentatively. As he looked at her he was conscious of a ridiculous satisfaction that such a fine woman should know her own mind so perfectly. She was a very complete creature, in her way. He realised that in this strangely assorted quartette he and she were involuntarily on one side of an intangible line, his niece and their unintelligible protegé on the other.

"Wait? But I did wait. I waited over a week," she explained, "and then I couldn't stand it any longer. He'd drive me to drink. For one thing,

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Henry's changed so. When we first knew him he was really as entertaining a gentleman as I ever saw—and I've had a great deal of attention. Why, we'd sit around and laugh till we nearly died, he'd say such ridiculous things. He was so different. Ma used to say if he was much funnier she'd think he'd ought to have a keeper! The way he'd go on——!"

Anne had turned her back and was looking steadily at the room they had left. Pippa and Delafield might have been alone.

"But when we got engaged, he seemed to change, somehow. I don't know if you've noticed it——"

Delafield nodded.

"Well, that's what I mean. I didn't care any more about him, then. I guess I sort of woke up," she laughed into his eyes. "He tires me to death with how he'll shoot himself," she added; "they always say that, you know, but they never do."

Anne moved toward the door and Delafield followed her.

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"I must say that I appreciate your position, Miss—Miss—" he stopped, inquiringly.

"Cooley—Miss Philippa Cooley," she supplied. "Of course you do. Ma said she hoped I'd have too much sense to stand up with a little radish of a man like that, even if he could support me!"

"But I think it was rather hard on all of us that you should have engaged yourself to him at all. You must have known how it would end." He tried to speak reprovingly.

She threw him a rich glance.

"Oh, you can't help it sometimes," she murmured. "He teased so hard—you don't want to be disagreeable. As I was telling Miss Delafield——"

"We must go," said Anne, briefly.

As they drove home, an inexplicable desire to provoke her, to rouse some warm feeling in her, mastered him.

"Your Aunt Ellen would enjoy this deep interest in the love affairs of an ex-druggist's clerk and a grocer's cashier," he said lightly.

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"Would she?" Anne returned quietly, and was ashamed of his freakish impulse.

When they told him that evening that they had been able to accomplish nothing he only stared at them gloomily.

"I knew it—I knew it," he muttered. "I did a poem last night—it's the last I shall ever do. You can put it in the book. It's the best I've done yet."

Delafield hardly noticed his words as he seized the poem. What if from this sordid little tragedy had sprung the very flower of the poet's genius? He read eagerly. In a moment his face fell. He stared doubtfully at the boy.

"Well," said West irritably, "can't you read it? Give it here—I'll read it to you."

"You needn't, I can read it well enough."

"What do you think of it?"

"I think it's rot," Delafield returned curtly. He was bitterly disappointed.

"Rot?" the boy's eyes narrowed. "What d'you mean?"

"I mean that this doggerel is utterly unworthy of you, West, and that you certainly cannot in-

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clude it in your book. It is the cheapest sentimentalism—good heavens, can't you see it? Have you no critical faculty whatever?"

"Oh, Uncle Lester, *don't!*" Anne implored. "Let me see it," and she put out her hand. The young man struck it away and seized the paper.

"I won't trouble you with my 'rot' any more, Mr. Delafield," he said, with a boyish grandiloquence, "we'll see what other people have to say about it."

"Here, West, don't go away angry!" the older man urged, "I shouldn't have been so harsh. You've done such fine work that I couldn't bear——"

"Oh, hush your noise!" West interrupted, brutally, "neither can I bear! You've driven me to death between you all — you'll never see me again!" and he flung out of the room.

Delafield set his teeth. "This is too much," he said slowly. "The vulgar little cad! No, I won't go after him, Anne; let him fume it out himself. I'll try to ask D—— over next week, just the same."

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But when Mr. D—— came over, full of pleasant anticipation, it was only to hear of the shocking death of the boy, whose photograph, taken from a cheap gilt locket of Pippa's, he afterward used over the popular gift-card, "Dawn on the River."

"Couldn't even shoot himself like a gentleman," said Delafield roughly. "Jumping seven stories—pah!"

"But the poems—the poems?" urged the publisher, "surely they——"

Anne took from the table an oblong tin biscuit-box and softly lifted the cover.

"Here are the poems," she said, pointing to a mass of fine, grey paper-ashes.

"He sent them to you?"

Mr. D——'s eyes lighted comprehensively; he glanced at the girl's white face and inscrutable dark-ringed eyes with a restrained sympathy.

"He sent them to my uncle," she replied quietly.

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THE BACKSLIDING OF HARRIET BLAKE

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THE BACKSLIDING OF HARRIET BLAKE

THE Rev. Mr. Freeland looked down the long, narrow poorhouse table, and then glanced inquiringly at the matron.

"What has become of Harriet Blake, Mrs. Markham?" he asked. "I thought she sat at this table—I hope she's not ill?"

"Harriet's backslid," announced the Widow Sheldon laconically. She was a Baptist, of the variety sometimes known as hard-shelled, and made nothing of interrupting the discourse of any representative of a denomination unpleasing to her.

"Backslid?" repeated the reverend guest, dropping his napkin.

"She don't believe in——"

"Harriet," interrupted the matron, somewhat crossly, and with an unconcealed frown for the Widow Sheldon, "Harriet is taking her dinner alone. She—she is not quite well, I think. I will

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speak to you about her later," she added as the pastor's eyes grew round at her. The widow Sheldon sniffed loudly.

"A person who has ter have her vittles carried up ter the bed-chamber on account o' losing any little faith she might 'a had," she began, but old Uncle Peterson broke in with his gentle drawl:

"Oh, come on, Mis' Sheldon, don't go and spile a good biled dinner with words o' bitterness," he urged. "Harriet's a good woman, as is known to all, and if she's travellin' through dark ways just now——"

The pastor looked puzzled, but he saw that the subject was better left alone: previous visits to the poorhouse had led him to dread the Widow Sheldon's tongue. He nodded approvingly at Uncle Peterson.

"Quite right, quite right," he said quickly. "That's the spirit for us all to have. Shall I ask the blessing, Mrs. Markham?" And the meal went on.

But there was something in the air that hot Sunday noon; something that lent variety to the

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usual monotony of the querulous meal-times. There was less comment on the food than was usual, and the Widow Sheldon's resentful silence was more impressive than her ordinary vindictive volubility. It appeared that something had actually happened.

Once in her private sitting-room the matron began, low-voiced, with an occasional glance at the closed door, as if to make certain that no curious inmate lurked behind it:

"If Harriet Blake doesn't grow more sensible very soon I shall certainly go crazy; I invited you, Mr. Freeland, to dinner to-day because Harriet used to like your prayers in the afternoon, and it may help her to talk to you—but I don't know. She's a very obstinate old lady. The whole house talks about nothing else, and she's just morbid enough to like it. They gossip about her and fight about her till the air is blue with it. It was bad enough at election time, but religion is worse than politics."

The pastor made as if he would interrupt, but she overbore him.

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"If you can't stop her she must go home to her niece, though she can't really afford to keep her and oughtn't to be asked——"

"Do I understand that Harriet is in doubt—has lost her Christian faith?"

"Oh, well—no; but in a way I suppose she has. She says that she—she can't see—in fact, she doesn't believe any more in the Holy Ghost!"

"Doesn't *believe* in h—in it?" Mr. Freeland was absolutely unprepared for precisely this form of agnosticism, and showed it.

"She says she doesn't see any sense in it," responded Mrs. Markham, briefly.

"Oh—ah, yes!" The pastor looked vaguely over her head. There was a pause, and then he gathered himself together.

"But this—this is all wrong!" he said forcibly.

"So we tell her," replied the matron.

"It is sinful—it is extremely dangerous!" he repeated, still more forcibly.

"That's what the Widow Sheldon says," replied the matron. "She lectures her about it every meal,

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and Harriet can't stand it. She says she can't help what she believes, and I can't blame her for that."

"How long——"

"She's been so for two weeks now, and she gets worse and worse. I had the Methodist minister—Harriet used to attend that church—up to talk to her about it, to see if she'd feel better, and he talked for four hours. Harriet sat as still as a stone, he said, and never moved or paid the least attention to him. Finally he asked her why she didn't answer, and she said he hadn't asked her opinion that she could see. So he asked her what it was, and she said that the Lord Almighty created the earth and that his Son, the Redeemer, saved it, and she didn't see anything more for the Holy Ghost to do. And everything that he told her she said one or the other could do perfectly well alone! And the angrier Mr. Dent got, the calmer Harriet was, I suppose, for he left in a rage, almost—I suppose it was trying, even for a minister—and when I went up to Harriet she seemed very calm. She told me triumphantly that the last thing she

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did was to show him that big Bible of hers with the picture in the front, where she's crossed out the figure of the dove with ink, and to tell him that she was no Papist, to worship graven images of birds!"

Mr. Freeland shook his head gravely. "Dear, dear, dear!" he said.

"And then I got Dr. Henshawe from St. Mary's, in the city, you know, who's out here this summer, to come in. He's a very fine man, and very interesting. He stayed a while with Harriet, and told her not to mind, but to go on, and pray, and do the best she could, and she couldn't be blamed. He told me afterwards that he was far from considering her religious condition a safe one, but that she would soon be ill, and was growing morbid, and he tried to soothe her. She fell into a dreadful passion, and called him a lukewarm Jesuit, and told him that she was going to hell just because she couldn't believe in the Holy Ghost! He was very polite and quiet, and picked a rose when he went—he complimented the house—but Harriet wouldn't eat any dinner nor tea,

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she was so angry. Of course it excites the others —they haven't much to think about, you know— and I'm really growing nervous. Old William Peterson, that gentle old man, preached a revivalist sermon day before yesterday, and got them all stirred up, so that Mrs. Sheldon groaned and cried all night, and kept Sarah Waters awake. And when Sarah stays awake all night, there's no living with her—none!"

Mr. Freeland looked frankly puzzled. He was not a particularly able man, and very far from originality of any sort. His doctrinal position, though always considered very solid, was somewhat stereotyped, and he had never happened to run against this peculiar form of apostasy. But he was a kindly man, and very honestly convinced of the responsibility of his position; moreover, he remembered Harriet pleasantly; he had thought her a very nice old lady. So he took his little Bible out of his pocket, and hoped that a desire to succeed where Mr. Dent and Dr. Henshawe had failed would not be accounted to him for unrighteousness.

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Mrs. Markham led the way across the hall and up the stairs. Before a door she paused to say, "As long as Harriet is upset in this way she has the room alone, because Mary Smith scolds her all night for being so sinful, and it makes them both cross. Mary is in the hall-room, and talks in her sleep so that nobody can rest very well. It doesn't disturb Harriet at all, she's such a sound sleeper, and I wish she could go back! You don't know how this disturbs us! Remember that we have prayer-meeting at half-past four," and she left him alone before the door.

Mr. Freeland knocked loudly and entered. Before him in the clean, bare room, with its rag-carpets, mats, and pine furnishings, sat a little old woman, her hands folded in her lap, her head erect, her eyes fixed uncompromisingly on the door. He started as he saw her face; it was so changed from the time, two weeks or more ago, when he had delivered that admirable prayer for charity and loving kindness on the occasion when the Widow Sheldon had thrown the butter-plate at old Mis' Landers. Thin and sunken, with dark

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serried hollows under her still bright eyes—she had aged ten years in those weeks.

"My sister, my poor, suffering, misled sister," began the pastor; but Harriet's eyes flashed ominously.

"If you come to talk to me about that Holy Ghost, I ain't got nothin' to say," she declared, "an' if you think I'm goin' to say another word myself, you're mistaken. I'm a pore sinful woman, but I ain't goin' to be pestered t' death! I'm doin' the best I can 'bout it, an' I've prayed 'bout it, an' Mr. Dent an' a Papist, they both talked 'bout it till I nearly died. I don't see any more sense in it than I did before—not a morsel. So if that's what brought you, you might just as well start back this minute!"

Her reverend guest stared at her dumfounded. Was this the little woman who had pressed his hand at the prayer-meeting and thanked him so piously, so meekly, for such "beautiful prayin'?"

"You are greatly changed since I saw you last, Miss Blake," he said gravely. "Your spirit was

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gentler, your mind was more religiously inclined. I found you——"

"You didn't find me pestered t' death," said Harriet briefly, somewhat mollified by his "Miss Blake."

"I was led to believe that you were suffering, that you were in trouble," hazarded the pastor.

Never in his somewhat self-sufficient life had he felt such difficulty in giving spiritual advice. Even to his thick-skinned personality it was deeply evident that this sharp-tongued little woman was in great trouble. Ordinarily, a certain facility for quotation and application made him a confident speaker, but to-day he felt impeded, held back by the self-control and patience of his listener. For he saw that she was patient; that she could say much more if she chose; that she was, beneath all her sharpness, alarmed and worried.

His somewhat perplexed air, his evident memory of her earlier estate, his startled recognition of her changed appearance had the effect that

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nothing else could have had. Her hands twisted nervously in her lap, her mouth twitched, she dropped her eyes, and opened her lips once or twice without speaking. Suddenly, with a little gasp, she began:

"If you think I don't care, you're mistaken. I'm just about sick. I been a Christian and a good believer all my life, and now I ain't. Maybe I don't care about that? They just pester me t' death, and Mis' Markham, she can't stop 'em. They'll send me back to Sarah's, that's my niece, and they can't keep me there. They ain't good to me there, and I get fever 'n ague every day o' my life there. But I can't help it—I can't help it! I got ter go!"

Some good angel held Mr. Freeland silent, and after a moment she went on.

"I'm sixty-two years old, and I never was anything but a churchgoer an' a believer. Two weeks ago to-day I set in this chair an' looked out the winder, an' I see the birds pickin' in the front yard."

He followed her eyes and watched for a mo-

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ment the poor house pigeons preening and posing in the noon sun. They whitened the summer grass, and their clucking and cooing formed the undertone of the old woman's confession.

"I see 'em there, and I got thinkin' about the dove in my Bible an' the Holy Ghost. And it just come into my mind like a shot—what's the good of it? What'd it ever done for me? What's the sense of a bird, anyhow? An' I worked over it, and I worried over it, an' I got to talkin' with Mis' Sheldon about it while we was workin' together, and she just made me hate it more. She said I'd go to hell—me, a believer for sixty-two years! An' I've cried till I can't cry any more, an' I've prayed till I'm tired of prayin', and nothin' happens to me exceptin' I hate it more. An' if they send me back to Sarah's I'll die, that's the truth. But I'll have t' go—I'll have t' go!"

She rocked back and forth, dry-eyed, but in an agony of grief. The pastor remembered the time when he had wrestled with certain damnation in the form of terrible religious doubt, and experienced again that peculiar helplessness, that isola-

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tion, that terror of hope gone from him that had dignified even his commonplace life. His vocabulary forsook him, his periods and phrases receded from his mind like the tide from the beach, and left it bare of suggestion. He looked at her for a moment, and as she bent her tired old head over her arm and sobbed the dry, creaking sob of the ageing spirit that looks forward to no long and gayer future, he felt that the time was short and kindness not too lenient for the sinner.

"I will send my wife over," he said, suddenly. "Would—would you want to see her?"

Harriet had stiffened again and got herself in hand. "I don't want that any one should put 'emselves out for me," she said dryly. "I guess I'll get along. I'd just as lief see Mis' Freeland if it ain't any trouble to any one. But I don't know as anybody c'n do anything. I ain't very pleasant comp'ny. An' I dunno as the room 's cleared up enough. I ain't swept it sence day before yesterday."

Her guest had risen and moved toward the door. He felt curiously cold and dull. Was this the

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help he had come to give? His tongue was tied; his lips refused to utter even one text.

"Good-afternoon, Miss Blake," he said.

"Good-afternoon," said Harriet, and he went out.

She shut the door behind him, and stood for a moment looking at the pigeons. Emotion had shaken her too often of late, and she was too tired to bear more confusion of feeling. She only knew that she was very tired, and that she should like to get away from the scene of so many struggles. Suddenly she took her gingham sunbonnet from the wall, and left the room. She went softly down the hall, and slipping through the screen door near the lower end crept down the back stairs and through the deserted kitchen.

A Sunday stillness reigned there, and no one was near to see her. She got a piece of bread from the large pantry, and noticed with disgust that the shelves were dusty and the bread-tin full of pieces and crusts. To keep this neat was her work, but she had been excused for the last three days, since she was far too weak to manage it. Out

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through the last blind-door, and she was in the field behind the barn. She walked feverishly to the little wood close by and sank down exhausted under a large chestnut-tree.

"I'm tired—I'm dead tired out!" she whispered to herself. "I'll just stay here a minute 'fore I go on."

Had Mr. Freeland seen her then he would have been more startled than before, for two red spots burned in her sunken cheeks and her eyes glittered unnaturally. She had not eaten since breakfast, for the boiled dinner had sickened her, and though she was weak for want of food she had not strength to munch the great piece of rye bread. Her head swam a little and strange tunes seemed to sound all about her. Her mother's voice, almost in her ear, sang her to sleep with the Old Hundred Doxology, and for a moment she listened entranced, but as the phantom voice reached the last line she opened her eyes.

"No, no!" she screamed. "No, no! I won't sing to a bird! I won't! I'll go to Sarah's first!"

A stillness that frightened her followed. Some-

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thing pattered beside her, and she looked apprehensively at the sky through a rift in the branches.

"Don't say it's rain!" she whispered, nervously. "I'm fearful scairt o' thunder-storms!"

The sky was rapidly clouding over, and a growl of thunder answered her. She started up, but fell helplessly back.

"O Lord, I can't move! I can't move a step! I'm too heavy!" she cried in terror. The storm came on fast; the branches shook under a sudden wind, and the birds grew still. She was too weak to realise fully her situation, but what consciousness she owned was swallowed up in terror. A sudden flash, and she shrank together with a moan.

"I'm out o' my head—I'm not really here—I'm in the house—I wouldn't be here f'r anything!" she whispered. A heavy clap, and she screamed with fear. The time when she left the house was far away and misty in her mind. She could not remember coming. The drops struck her in quick succession and the muttering grew more frequent, the flashes brighter. Sick with fright, she cowered under the tree. Her childhood unfolded before her,

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her girlhood; her poor pinched life assumed a glory and fulness it had never had. So warm, so sheltered, so contented it seemed to her.

A great harsh clap shook the little wood and a vivid glare wrapped her about. With a wail she fell back against the tree-trunk. Her mind was clear again, she recalled everything. She had been led out here to die. She was summoned forth to meet the judgment of God. Heretic, infidel, blasphemer that she was, she was to go before Him that day!

Her clothes were soaked with rain, she shivered with cold, she was too weak to take a step, but she staggered to her knees and folded her hands. The tree swayed above her, the wood was dark as night, the rain to her weak nerves was deafening; the powers of darkness raged about her. She tried to pray for forgiveness, for peace at the last, but in her mind, all too clear, was the remembrance of her life for two weeks past. She set her teeth to keep them from chattering so, and shivering at each clap and gasping at each flash, she prayed:

"O Lord, if you are sendin' this storm to pun-

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ish me, I can't help it. I've believed in you all my life, and I'm sixty-two and I'm going to die in a thunder-storm. If it'll save me to believe in the Holy Ghost, then I'll have to be damned eternally as the Widder Sheldon says you'll do, for I can't, I can't, I can't! I' been a believer all my life, and I' only been this way two weeks, and if that counts against all the rest, I'll just haf' to go to hell, that's all. Feelin' as I do, you can't expect me to change for a thunder-storm, Lord, scairt as I be. It don't make no difference that I'm scairt, I feel just the same. I' been a sinful woman, an' I pray to be forgiven, but I can't change, Lord, I can't, an' you wouldn't respect me if I was ter. Amen."

A glare that seemed to brighten the wood for minutes and a terrific burst of thunder answered her. With a little gasp she fell backward and lay unconscious. The storm raged about her, but she knew nothing of it. A little withered old woman, she lay in a heap in the lap of all the elements, and they beat upon her like a leaf.

If it were hours or minutes she did not know, but she opened her eyes with pain upon a quiet

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world. The storm had passed, the leaves were dripping, the sun was just beginning to brighten the blue, the birds were twittering again. She got up heavily, but with a certain fitful strength. She turned around and dragged herself further into the wood. Then, in dread of the thicker foliage, she struck off uncertainly to the right. To her the vengeance of God was only delayed; there was only a momentary escape, but it was precious. She was confused, terrified, beaten. She had no notion in what direction the house lay. She felt her legs tottering and reached painfully down to pick up a large, gnarled, broken bough. The effort all but stretched her beside it. But she leaned on it, and turned her shaking head from one side to another. All was thick, wet, glistening, confusing. Only the twitter of the birds and the drip, drip of the wet leaves broke the deadly stillness. A nameless horror caught her. She felt alone in the world.

"O Lord, O dear Lord, show me the way home!" she prayed. "Let me die at home, Lord; don't let me die out here—a poor old woman like me! Sixty-

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two, Lord, an' a believer all my life! Send me home!"

There was a little rustling noise in the tree near the tiny clearing just before her; a low, soft heavenly sound.

"I know I'm goin' to die, Lord, only let me die at home! Don't do it here! I'm scairt, an' I'm weak, an' I'm too old to die in the woods! Jus' send me home, Lord; show me where the house is!"

The great sun suddenly sent a long, bright ray down across the open space, and as she looked at it, there hovered, full in the brightness, a gleaming silver dove. With wings outspread, motionless, too bright to look at with steady eyes, it hovered there. It never fluttered its wings; it made no sound; in a ray from heaven it held its quiet position serenely and glistened from every tiniest feather.

The old woman's knees tottered beneath her. She held with both hands to the gnarled staff, and shuddered as she gazed.

"The Holy Ghost! The Holy Ghost!" she panted. The bird's eyes met hers, and she could not take her own away. To her blurred, smarting

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vision it seemed that an aureole of glory outlined its head. She had no thoughts; only a confused sensation of immediate and inescapable doom. Death, death here, with this grave and moveless vision was her part. She closed her eyes and waited. A second, and she opened them, to see the vision changed; the bird had turned around, and was slowly guiding down the little clearing before her. Just above her head it flew, with steady pace, and with it went all the brightness of the sun.

Her lips moved. She took a step forward, and the bird advanced. "Glory be to God!" she whispered, "It'll show me the way!"

She never took her aching eyes for one second from the wonderful white thing. She scorned to watch the ground. With a magnificent faith she walked, her head lifted, her heart too full to know if she stumbled. In the clear places, always where there were no branches, the white guide flew and Harriet walked after with her staff. A few moments took them out of the wood, but she never looked for the house. In the full glare of day, against the blue, the bird looked only snowier,

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and to her dazzled, burning eyes the aureole grew only brighter and bigger. She could not see its wings move; it hovered steadily and floated serenely upon the clear air, and the old woman saw it, and it only.

She did not see the anxious crowd on the porch, she did not hear their exclamations, she did not know that her lips were moving, that her voice, low, husky, but distinguishable, repeated over and over, almost mechanically: "Forgive me, Lord! forgive me, Lord! O Lord, forgive me!"

She only followed, followed with all her heart and soul and strength, up the little hill, up the path, up to the porch, a strange, shaking pilgrim, leaning heavily on her staff, guided by the white pigeon.

On the steps they received her, and as she sank on the lowest, they caught her, falling. Her almost sightless eyes were yet uplifted, and while to their view the dove dropped down among its mates, a patch among the white, to her it was mingled with the summer blue, and vanished in the sky whence it came.

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Her body was utterly exhausted, but her spirit could not yet lose its consciousness. On the wave of her exaltation she rose higher and higher. She looked at them with a look they had never seen in any human being.

"I'm saved! I'm saved!" she cried.

They watched her, silent, terrified, awed beyond words at this redemption they could only feel but could not understand. But as they stared, her eyes glazed, her head fell back against the matron's arm.

"Pray! pray!" she whispered. The pastor looked at her and steadied himself. Wonder and a sense of strength flowed in on him suddenly. But there was scant time for prayer. Though the light in her face had not yet died away, her breath was scarcely moving. He came near her and repeated gently the hymn she had in the time of her trouble disowned, but which she had always loved:

"Praise God from whom all blessings flow,
Praise Him all creatures here below,
Praise Him above ye heavenly host——"

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Her eyes opened and looked wide into the blue; what she saw there they did not know, but she smiled faintly.

"Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!"

"Oh, yes! Oh, yes!" the matron guessed that she murmured; and with the cooing and clucking of pigeons sounding through the summer air, she died.

A white, arrow-swift creature whirred through the stillness, up, up, and out in a great proud curve; their eyes were too dim to know if it turned again to the earth.

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A BAYARD OF BROADWAY

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A BAYARD OF BROADWAY

THE younger man — he was only a boy — grinned impishly at the elder, bringing out the two dimples in his flushed, girlish cheeks.

"That's all right enough, Dill," he drawled; he always drawled when he had been drinking. When he was sober the familiar Huntington staccato was very marked in him.

"That's all right, Dilly, my boy, and a grand truth, as old Jim used to tell us at chapel, but maybe little Robert doesn't see your game? Oh, yes, he sees it, fast enough. Sis hands it out to you, and you recite it to Robbie, and Robbie reforms, and you get Sis! How's that for a young fellow who flunks his math? Not bad, eh?"

Dillon flushed and set his teeth, mastering an almost irresistible longing to slap those red cheeks in vicious alternation. To think that this chattering young idiot stood between him and his heart's desire!

Bob drawled on: "Anyhow, Dill, I think it's

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right queer, you know. Why don't she marry you? She can't love you very much, if it depends on me. You're a man o' the world, you know, man o' world"—he grew absent-minded and stared at the wall. Dillon snapped his fingers nervously, and the speaker began again with a start:

"That's what I say—a man o' world. Tell her it's all bosh worryin' over me, tell her that, Dill, tell her I say so. No use her tryin' to be my mother. Now is there, Dill, as a man, is there? If she got married and had some children of her own——"

"Bob," the older man burst out, "for heaven's sake, shut up, will you, and listen to me! I'm going to tell you the truth. You've got the whole thing in your hands—God knows why, but you have—and I'm going to lay it before you once for all. Then do as you please: make us all happy, or go to the devil your own way—and I'll go mine," he added, lower and quicker.

Bob sat up, blinked rapidly, and smoothed his hair down tight over his ears—sure sign that he was nearly himself.

"Go ahead," he said shortly, "I'll come in."

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Dillon bit his lip a moment; he would rather have taken a whipping than say what he had to say. The clock ticked loud in the pause, and Bob, every moment clearer-eyed, heavy sleep a thing of the past, stared at him disconcertingly.

"What I'm going to say to you," Dillon began, "isn't very often said by one man to another, I imagine. Few men are placed in just my position. I've known you all so well, I've seen so much of you all my life——" he paused.

"I needn't say how much I thought of your mother. When your father was—when he broke down so often at the last, of course I saw a great deal of her, and she trusted me a lot—she had to, once she began. When she died, and you weren't there, because you——"

"Don't! please don't, Dill!" the boy's lips contracted; his slim body twisted with a helpless remorse.

"Well, then, when she died she asked me to look out for you, because she knew how I loved her and —and Helena. She knew you had it in you, and she didn't blame you—they never do, I suppose,

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mothers—but she asked me if I'd try to look out for you. She knew I wasn't perfect myself. That's —that's why she thought I wouldn't do for Helena. Helena was always so wonderful, so high above——"

Again he stopped, and the boy's voice broke in:

"Helena's made of snow and ice-water," he said moodily, "she's too good for this earth. She doesn't know——"

"She knows what her brother should be, and she knows what her husband must be," Dillon interrupted sternly. "No sister could have been more of an angel to you, Bob.

"Now I'll go on. It's going to be necessary just here for me to tell you that I love your sister. You don't know anything about that, of course. You don't for a second of your life realise what it is to love a woman as I've loved her for—for five years, we'll say. I put it five because, though I loved her long before, things happened in between, and I don't count it till five years ago. Heaven knows I'm not worth her shoe-laces. Once or twice—before the five years—I've realised that

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a little too much, and then—the things happened. But since then I've honestly tried to keep to the mark your mother set me. She said to me once, 'If you would only keep as good as you are at your best, Lawrence, you'd be good enough for Helena,' and—perhaps because that wasn't so very good, after all—I've really been keeping there, after a fashion."

Bob stared at him in unaffected amazement. This clubman, this elegant, this social arbiter was standing before him with tears in his level grey eyes. It dawned upon his reckless young soul that the soul of another man was slowly and painfully stripping itself before him.

"We'll let that part of it go," Dillon went on hurriedly, "you couldn't see. I—I think I could make her happy, Bob. I know her better than she thinks. She almost said she'd have me, and then you went on that spree. You nearly broke her heart—I needn't go over it. Only she made a vow, then—it was when she went into that convent-place in Holy Week, and she's never been the same since—and it was about you."

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"About me? What d'you mean?"

"She told me she never could marry till she was certain whether you were just obstinate and wild, or—or like your father; and that in that case——"

"What, in that case?" Bob muttered through his teeth.

"She was going to devote her life to taking care of you."

There was a silence.

"There's no use in going over all the arguments now, Bob—you know what the doctor said. Three months without a drop, and then he'd warrant you. Every day that goes by makes it harder for you. And here's your Uncle Owen promising that the first month you go without a spree he'll send you for a three months' cruise on the yacht with Stebbins—you know what a chance that is."

Bob looked fairly up for the first time.

"Stebbins! Would Stebbins go? I don't believe you!" he cried eagerly.

"He told me he would," said Dillon.

"Why on earth should he?"

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"He's a friend of mine," the other answered simply.

Bob twisted his lips together a moment, while the muscles around his mouth worked. Suddenly he gave way and broke into sobbing speech.

"You're a good fellow, Dill—I'm not worth it—truly, I'm not! I've been a beast—and the college and all that—you all despise me—but so do I!"

He gripped the chair, turning his handsome, tear-stained face up to his friend's. How the straight, thin nose, the black-lashed blue eyes, the white forehead reflected Helena! Dillon could have kissed him for the likeness.

"Will you, Bob? Will you? We'll all stand by you!"

"I will, Dillon, I will, so help me—Bob!" he smiled through wet lashes. "You hang on, and I will! But look out for that rector—he's running a close second, and Aunt Sarah's backing him for all she's worth!" He was smiling wisely now; the strain was lifted, and he was almost himself again. Dillon scowled.

"He takes her slumming, you know, and, say,

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you ought to hear him give it to Aunt Sarah about knowing the condition the poor devils are in before you deal out the tracts, you know. He wants the good ladies and gentlemen to come and see—that way, you know."

"He's right enough there," Dillon said constrainedly, "and I suppose he's better for her than I'd be—no, by George, he's not! Bob, I tell you, I know her better than he does—I tell you I've waited five years—Oh, Lord, I can't talk any more about it!"

They went out arm in arm, the boy warm and friendly, proud of his confidence and full of high resolve, Dillon impassive outwardly, but conscious of great stakes. To say, in four short weeks, to those wide, blue eyes, a little scornful, perhaps, but with so sweet, so pure a scorn! "*The strain is over: he is safe; can you not trust me now?*" His heart leaped and grew large at the thought.

It was so like Helena, this service, half-sacred in her mother's trust, half-shy in maidenly delaying. "She is afraid of me!" he thought exultingly —indeed, she admitted as much.

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"You and your set—one knows you, and yet one doesn't," she said to him. "You seem so still, so satisfied, so sure about life—there seems to be so much you don't tell! Do you see what I mean? It frightens me. There is so much we don't think the same about, Lawrence—so much of you I don't know! I wanted, when I married, to come into a—a peace. I wanted it to be—don't laugh—like my Confirmation: do you think it would, if I married you? Do you, Lawrence?"

He turned his head away. A vision of her, those ten short years ago, in white procession down the aisle of Easter lilies, rapt and aloof, flashed before him. For one sweet second he saw her in fancy, again in white, but trembling now, and near him——

"Oh, dearest child," he begged, "I don't know about the peace—how can I? The things are so different! But we could be happy—I know we could! Is peace all you want, sweetheart, all?"

Caught by his eyes, her own wavered and dropped; a flood of red rose to her hair.

"Don't, Lawrence, you frighten me! When you

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look like that—Oh, wait a month, only this month, Lawrence, till Bob has gone and we're sure!"

"You want that more than anything else, don't you? You'd give up anything——"

Her eyes grew soft, then stern, and looked clearly into his.

"Anything in the world," she said instantly, "so that mamma could see he was—safe. I am all Bob has. Oh, if he can only——"

"He shall," Dillon assured her stoutly, "he shall, this time!"

And indeed it seemed that he would. He seemed awakened to the strongest effort they had known him to make. His uncle's offer, grimly set for one month from its date, or never, took on for him a superstitious colour of finality. He was convinced that it was his last chance.

"If I'm downed this time, Dill, it's all up," he would say, wearily, as they paced the endless city blocks together, arm in arm, under the night. "If I can keep up till the yacht—how long is it, a week?—then, something tells me I'm all right. I swear it's so. I never felt that before. But if I

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don't"—he paused ominously. "There's always one way out," he added.

"You will break Helena's heart, then."

"Heart? I don't think she has one. If she had, you'd have had her long ago. Oh, no, I sha'n't. She'll go into that beastly retreat for a while, and then she'll marry that crazy rector-man and go about saving souls. You'll see."

The week was nearly up. The yacht was ready in the harbour. The boy, though, showed the strain, and Dillon, fearful of too much dogging him, and warned by his furtive eyes and narrowed lips, called in Stebbins to the rescue.

"I can't have him hate me, Steb," he explained. "We're both of us worn pretty thin. If you could give up to-day and to-night——"

They shook hands.

"It's every minute, practically, you know, Steb," he added doubtfully, "it's a good deal."

"Oh, get on!" the other broke in, with a good-natured shoulder clap.

As he swung the glass door of the club behind him, Dillon ran down a messenger-boy, bulging

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with yellow envelopes. The boy glanced at him questioningly.

"Mist' Wardwell, Adams, Stebbins, 'r Waite?" he inquired, holding out four telegrams as he slipped in.

Dillon shook his head, and walked down the steps.

One more night and she would be all to win, no promise between, no scruple that a lover might not smother. Shame on him if he could not woo more persuasively than a mystical evangelist! In the evening he would see her; the precious little note lay warm over his heart.

He dined alone, he could not have said where, and an idle impulse for the lights and bustle of the great thoroughfare sent him strolling down Broadway. It was too early for the crowd, and he found himself guessing vaguely as to the characteristics of the couples that met and passed him. That tall, slender lad, for instance, with such a hint of Bob — poor, troublesome Bob! — in his loose, telltale swagger, what had led him to the dark-eyed creature that tapped her high heels be-

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side him? As she came under the light, one saw better; her flashing smile, her careless carriage of the head, her broad sweep of shoulder, had a certain charm—great heavens, it was Bob steadying himself on her arm! A moment, and the familiar drawl reached his ear:

"An' so you always want to choose mos' prom'-nent place, every time, an' you're safe's a church. No chance to meet y'r dear frien's——"

Dillon strode to his side, raising his hat to the surprised woman.

"I beg your pardon, Bob, but had you forgotten your engagement this evening?" he said smoothly. Bob stopped, glared a moment uncertainly, but the scrupulous courtesy of Dillon's bearing had its intended effect.

"What—what engagement?" he inquired suspiciously. "Friend o' mine," he added to his companion.

"Haven't you met Stebbins? He—he was expecting you." Lawrence felt his heart sink. Where was Stebbins? Oh, fool, to have lost hold at the eleventh hour!

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"Stebbins? Stebbins?" Bob murmured to himself. "Ah, yes; the beastly boat got afire, and he had to go down; I'm going too, after a while—too early yet—take a little walk, first, with Miss—Miss——" He paused, and stared thoughtfully at the woman. "I don't seem to just recall your name," he said pleasantly. "Would you mind telling me, so that I can introduce you? Bad form, his poking in, though, terribly bad form."

Dillon noted with anger that Bob was at his most argumentative, obstinate stage; at this point, if he felt the necessity, he could speak most correctly and clearly, by giving some thought to the matter, and it was almost impossible to alter his determinations.

"My name is Williams," said the woman. Dillon bowed.

"What have you had, Bob?" he inquired, moving along with them.

"Oh, only a cocktail—here and there—Miss—Miss Willis likes 'em as well as anything. About time we had another?" he suggested, eyeing Lawrence combatively.

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The older man stopped dead. A weary despair of the whole business seized him. It was all up, then. Even if he went about with the boy, which Bob would hardly allow, his condition next morning would be all too apparent. And then Uncle Owen would wash his hands of it all. Aunt Sarah would never consent to any institutional cure. Helena would never marry while Bob needed her—thank God, she had never suspected the woman!

As if in answer to his thoughts, Bob complained loudly:

"I say it's a blamed shame, the first time I go out with a girl to enjoy the evening, to have you pokin' in, Dill! Always stuck with the fellows before; and now I get a girl, like anybody else, and here you come! Why don't you get out? Two's company."

Dillon caught his arm.

"Bob," he said beseechingly, "you don't know what you're doing. Surely you know what this means! Don't you remember that the Eider-duck sails to-morrow at nine? Don't you realise that by

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this night's folly you're losing your last chance? Your last chance, Bob! Think how you called it that yourself! If this lady realised all this meant to you, she'd excuse you, I'm sure. Don't be a fool, Bob! Let me put you in a cab and go right to Stebbins—old Steb'll put you up, and nobody will ever know! You can sleep it off—it's only eight o'clock."

To his unexpected delight Bob yawned sleepily. His eyes were dull, his mouth drooped.

"Sleep it off," he murmured. "I wish I was in bed this minute. Lord, I'm tired. And I know why, too. I told her bromo-seltzer would settle me. Always puts me to sleep—no good at all. Fool to drink it. Told her so. . . ."

Dillon's spirits rose.

"That's so," he assented, "it always acts that way with you, doesn't it? Especially with cocktails. Now, you be a wise man, Bob," he urged, "and get into this cab——"

"And where do I come in?" said the woman sharply. "I call this a little queer, if you don't mind my saying so."

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Bob roused himself for a moment.

"Just so," he declared heavily, "just so. Where does Miss Willard come in? You must think I'm a terrible cad, Dill, to ask a lady out for the evening, and leave her like that! Not a bit of it! You go on! Sorry, but can't leave the lady."

Lawrence moved toward his pocket involuntarily. The woman struck his arm lightly.

"That'll do," she said sullenly. "I don't want your money. You think I'm a kind of a bundle, do you? Pick me up and drop me. Well, that's where you make a mistake. Why don't you let your friend alone?"

"Helen—she'll know. You say nobody will," Bob broke in suddenly. "She won't lie, if you will. She'll tell Uncle Owen. What's the use?"

"I won't tell her," Lawrence returned quickly, "and nobody else knows."

"Well, then," Bob faced him cunningly, walking backwards through the comparatively empty cross-street they had turned down, "I think maybe I'll do it. I want to go with Stebbins, all right.

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But" — his obstinacy rose again, suddenly — "I swear I won't go back on a lady! Nobody offer a lady money in my presence! 'Twon't do, Dill! Get out!"

"Bob," Lawrence urged, despairingly, "if I take Miss Williams wherever she wants to go, and she will accept my escort"—he half turned to her, but his doubt was not evident, if he had it—"will you go to Stebbins?"

Bob stopped short, nearly falling backwards.

"Great head!" he cried. "Never thought old Dilly had it in him! I'll—I'll consider the prop—the prop—the plan." He yawned widely. "I certainly am sleepy," he observed, sinking on a convenient step.

Dillon shook him and dragged him up.

"Come," he said, shortly, "will you?"

Bob pointed a theatrical finger at them.

"Do you, Dilly, being of sound mind, body, or estate, give me your solemn word of honour as a gentleman to escort Miss Willins wherever she wants to go? Do you?"

"And drop me when your back's turned," inter-

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posed the woman, laconically, but not angrily. Her interest was awakened, perhaps her sense of humour, too, and she awaited developments philosophically.

"Never a bit," Bob returned. "You don't know old Dill. If he says it, he'll do it, if there were what-do-you-call-'ems in the way."

"I give you my word of honour," said Lawrence, steadily.

"And you'll never tell Helen? Because if you do, she tells Uncle Owen, and it's all up with Robbie."

"I will never tell her."

"On your word of honour?"

"On my word of honour."

"Then call your cab and tuck me in my little bed. My eyes will crack if I prop 'em up any longer."

"Miss—Miss—I can't recall your name, but you don't object? . . ."

"Oh, no, I don't object in the least," said Miss Williams satirically, with a wondering glance at the tall, immaculate gentleman at her side, his face

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stern in the electric-light, his evening clothes in marked contrast to Bob's negligée. "In fact, I rather——"

Dillon whistled a cab and gave the driver whispered directions. A bill fluttered as he passed it up. The man nodded, respectful.

"And now I am at your service," said Dillon, standing tall and straight before her. "Where did you wish to go?"

Not for one moment did it occur to him to evade his duty, and not for one moment did she intend that he should. Where they went, through all that nightmare evening, he could never afterward tell. From dance-hall to concert-hall they wandered, sat awhile, and departed. Nor were they silent on the way. What they spoke of he could not have told for his life, but they talked, fairly steadily at first, less and less as the night wore on, and the woman grew dreamily content with the lights, the warmth, and the liquor. Dillon was imperturbably polite, gravely attentive to her wishes, curiously conscious of one life with her and another distinct existence at Helena's home. Now he was waiting,

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waiting, waiting in front of the close-shaded windows to see if she had left the house or if she still sat in surprised idleness expecting him. Now he was at Stebbins's house watching Bob as he lay asleep there.

He remembered afterward thinking that the woman must have been a Southerner, for, as she drank, her tongue turned to those softer tones, slurred vowels and quaint idioms.

"It seems like you're having a good time, after all," she said once. He bowed gravely.

By eleven they were well down-town, he was not quite certain where. They stayed but little time in any one place. It seemed as if they had been on this endless journey for years. Now and then he saw a man he knew. In one place he wakened, with a shock of remembrance, to the fact that he had been there before: there, and at the place opposite, too. How little it had changed! It was before the five years. . . .

They were at a corner table, he with his back to the room, the woman facing it. On a platform opposite a young fellow sat before a piano, strik-

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ing desultory chords. Presently he began to sing, in a sweet, piercing tenor:

"Oh, promise me that some day you and I——"

There was a moved silence through the room; his voice had a quality that reached for the heart:

"Those first sweet violets of early spring——"

Dillon glanced at the woman; her large, dark eyes were brimmed with tears. A great pity surged over him: he would have given anything he owned to be able to offer her her life to live again. Tenderly, as over a dusty, broken bird, he laid his hand over her clasped ones on the table. They sat in awed silence; the song swelled on. He did not hear the door open behind him, nor turn as a new party of four entered quietly. Directly behind his chair a man's voice spoke softly.

"This is a fair sample. Not very bad, you think? But every man in this room is a confirmed opium-eater, and the women——"

The two at the table hardly heard.

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"Oh, the women!" said a woman's voice in a rough whisper. "I cannot bear to think——"

"Oh, it isn't the women, Aunty! You sha'n't say that—they are heart-breaking. It's the men, the men I bl——"

Swiftly, hopelessly, as the steel turns to the magnet, Dillon turned and faced Helena Huntington.

As her eyes met his all the rose colour in her soft cheeks seemed to sweep into his and burn dully there, leaving her whiter than bone. For one fiery second her eyes rested on the table, the half-emptied glasses, the clasped hands of the pair, the tear-stained cheeks of the handsome girl. For one breath two groups of stone confronted each other. Then, with no sign of recognition, she swept from her seat, her hand on the rector's arm, her aunt and an older man behind them. Her aunt looked at Dillon as if he were the chair he sat in.

The door swung behind them.

" No life so perfect as a life with thee,
Oh, promise me ; oh, promise me ! "

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the tenor shrilled. Lawrence burst into jangling laughter.

"The evening is over," he said, still red and shaking. "Allow me to escort you home."

He never remembered the time between this speech and the moment when she asked him to step in for a while, and he laughed in her face. Then there was another time, and he was at his rooms at the club. But that was early morning. He was lame and his shoes hurt his feet—he must have walked a great deal.

At eight o'clock Stebbins dashed into the room.

"Well, of all the fellows! What's the matter with you?"

He was fresh and rosy; a faint, wholesome aroma of cigars and eau-de-cologne swept in with him.

"Why the deuce aren't you down to see us off? They're all there. Got my telegram yesterday? Fire didn't amount to much, but the fools hadn't half the stuff I ordered. I was down there all the afternoon seeing to it. I sent Bob right around

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to you. You must have walked him well. Stevens said he came in at eight and tumbled straight to bed. He's fresh as paint this morning. Asked him where he'd been, and I swear he didn't know. Says you told him to go to bed, and he went. Drove home, he says. Actually doesn't remember a living thing but that, since dinner. When you said he'd be that way sometimes I didn't really believe you, but I do now. Where were you?"

Dillon faced him.

"For God's sake, Lawrence, what is it? Are you sick? She said you wouldn't be there——"

"She? Who?"

"The old one—the aunt. Bob was wondering about it, and she says directly, 'No, he won't be here this morning,' so I slipped off. Bob said if you were tired, never mind.

"I say, Lawrence, that's an awfully attractive boy. You can't help liking him. He called me aside, and, 'Look here,' says he, 'Uncle Owen says there's to be no wine packed for you. Now I can't have that, Stebbins, it won't do. It's awfully bully of you to come, and you must have everything

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you want.' I told him that would be all right and what a fine vacation it was going to be for me——"

Lawrence turned the water into the tub and began to pull at his shoes. Never had he felt so grateful for Stebbins's constant chatter.

"I don't believe I'll come down," he heard himself say. "I have a beastly headache. I didn't get much sleep——"

"Well, for heaven's sake get some, if it makes you look like that! Where'd you go, anyway, after you put Bob to bed?"

Lawrence pulled off his coat.

"Parson's down there, you know. He and uncle seem to be hand in glove. He's pretty well fixed with most of the family, I shouldn't wonder."

"How much time have you got?" said Lawrence's voice.

"George, not much! Cab's waiting outside. I won't mention how you look, then—just tell 'em good-bye."

"That's all. Just tell 'em good-bye."

Lawrence was in the bath-room as Stebbins

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hurried out. He sat down on the porcelain rim of the tub, his face drawn and grey above his white shirt.

"It seems to be pretty well settled up," he said quietly. "I hope his mother's pleased!"

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A LITTLE BROTHER OF THE BOOKS

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A LITTLE BROTHER OF THE BOOKS

THE new librarian entered upon her duties bright and early Monday morning. She closed with a quick snap the little wicket-gate that separated the books from the outer vestibule, briskly arranged her paste-tube, her dated stamp, and her box of slips, and summoned her young assistant sharply. The assistant was reading *Molly Bawn* and eating caramels, and she shut book and bag quickly, wiping her mouth as she hurried to her superior.

"Now, Miss Mather, I expect to get fifty books properly labelled and shelved before noon," said the new librarian, "and there must be no time wasted. If anyone wants me, I shall be in Section K," and she turned to go.

Section K was only a few feet from the registering-table, but it pleased the new librarian to assume the existence of long corridors of volumes,

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with dumb-waiters and gongs and bustling, basket-laden attendants. So much majesty did she throw into her sentence, indeed, that the young assistant, who had always, under the old régime, privately referred to Section K as "those old religious books," and advised the few persons interested in them to "go right in behind and see if the book you refer to is there," was staggered for a moment, and involuntarily glanced behind her, to see if there had been a recent addition to the building.

The new librarian strode down between the cases, glancing quickly from side to side to detect mislaid or hastily shoved-in volumes. Suddenly she stopped.

"What are you doing in here, little boy?" she said abruptly.

In the angle of the case marked "Books of Travel, Adventure, etc.," seated upon a pile of encyclopædias, with his head leaning against *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea*, was a small boy. He was dark of eyes and hair, palely sallow, ten or eleven years old, to appearance. By his side leaned a crutch, and a clumsy wooden

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boot, built up several inches from the sole, explained the need of this. A heavy, much-worn book was spread across his little knees.

He looked up vaguely, hardly seeming to see the librarian.

"What are you doing here? How did you get in?" she repeated.

"I'm reading," he replied, not offering to rise, "I just came in."

"But this isn't the place to read. You must go in the reading-room," she admonished him.

"I always read here. I'd rather," he said, pleasantly enough, dropping his eyes to his book, as if the matter were closed.

Now the new librarian thoroughly disapproved of the ancient custom that penned the books away from all handling, and fully intended to throw them open to the public in a few months' time, when she should have them properly systematised; but she resented this anticipation of what she intended for a much-appreciated future privilege.

"But why should you read in here, when none of the other children can?" she demanded.

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The boy raised his eyes again.

"Mr. Littlejohn lets me—I always do," he repeated.

The new librarian pressed her lips together with an air of highly creditable restraint.

"Mr. Littlejohn allowed a great many irregularities which have been stopped," she announced, "and as there is no reason why you should do what the other children cannot, you will have to go. So hurry up, for I'm very busy this morning."

She did not speak unkindly, but there was an unmistakable decision in her tone, and the boy got up awkwardly, tucked his crutch under his arm, and laying the big book down with care, went out in silence, his heavy boot echoing unevenly on the hardwood floor. The librarian went on to Section K.

Presently the young assistant, who had been accustomed to keep her crocheted lace-work on the Philosophical shelf, directly behind the *Critique of Pure Reason*, recollected that it would in all human probability be discovered, on the removal of that epoch-making treatise, and came hastily down

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to get it. Having concealed it safely in her pocket, she paused.

"That was Jimmy Reese you sent out—did you know it?" she asked.

"No, what of it?"

"Why, nothing, only he's always read in here ever since I came. Mr. Littlejohn was very fond of him. He helped pick out some of the books. He——"

"Picked out the books — that child? Great heavens!"

"Well, he's read a good deal, Jimmy has," the assistant contended. "It's all he does. He can't play like the other children, he's so lame. He seems real old, anyhow. And he's always been here. He helps giving out the books, and helps the children pick out. He was very convenient when Mr. Littlejohn didn't like to be waked up."

"Great heavens!" the librarian cried again.

"I think you'll find he'll be missed, you being so new," the assistant persevered.

"I think I can manage to carry on the library, Miss Mather," replied her superior coldly, "with-

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out any assistance from the children of the town. Will you begin on that Fiction, please?"

She walked on again, but paused to put away the brown book, which lay where the intruder had left it, a mute witness to the untidiness of the laity. Opening it briskly, she glanced at the title:

The
AGE OF FABLE
or
BEAUTIES OF MYTHOLOGY
by
THOMAS BULFINCH

Below was a verse of poetry in very fine print; she read it mechanically.

O, ye delicious fables! where the wave
And woods were peopled, and the air, with things
So lovely! why, ah! why has science grave
Scattered afar your sweet imaginings?

BARRY CORNWALL.

It flashed into her mind that an absolutely shameless subscriber had retained Miss Proctor's collected poems for three weeks now, and she made a hasty note of the fact on a small pad that hung from her belt. Then she set the *Age of Fable*

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in its place and went on about her work, the incident dismissed.

The next afternoon as she was sorting out from the department labelled, "Poetry, Miscellaneous Matter, etc.," such books as Mr. Littlejohn had found himself unable or unwilling to classify further, shaking down much dust on the further side of the shelves in the process, she was startled by a faint sneeze. Her assistant was compiling a list of fines at the desk, and this sneeze came from her very elbow, it seemed, so she hastily dismounted from her little ladder and peered around the rack. There sat the little boy of yesterday, the same brown book spread across his knees. She looked severe.

"Is this Jimmy Reese?" she inquired stiffly.

"Yes'm," he answered, with a polite smile. He had an air of absolute unconsciousness of any offence.

"Well, don't you remember what I told you yesterday, Jimmy? This is not the reading-room. Why don't you go there?"

"I like it better here."

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The librarian sighed despairingly.

"Perhaps you don't know who I am," she explained, not crossly, but with that air of detachment and finality that many people assume in talking with children. "I am Miss Watkins, the new librarian, and when I give an order here it must be obeyed. When I tell any one to do anything, I expect them to do it, because—because they must," she concluded lamely, a little disconcerted by the placid stare of the brown eyes. "You see, if all the little boys came in here, there would be no room for us to work."

"But they don't—nobody comes but me," he reminded her.

"Suppose," she demanded, "that someone should call for that book you are reading. I shouldn't know where to look for it."

"Nobody ever wants it but me," he assured her again.

"I have no time to argue," she said irritably, "you must do as I tell you. Put the book up and run away."

Without another word he laid the book on the

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broad base-shelf, picked up his crutch, and went out. As she watched his retreating figure, a little uneasy feeling troubled her usual calm. He seemed so small, so harmless a person.

A little later it occurred to her to see how he had entered the library, and stepping through the two smaller rooms at the back, choked and dusty with neglected piles of old magazines, she noticed a door ajar. Picking her way through the chaos, she pulled the knob, and saw that it gave on a tiny back porch. On the steps sat the janitor, as incompetent, from the librarian's point of view, as his late employer.

"I thought you were sweeping off the walks, Thomas," she suggested, coughing as the wreaths from his pipe reached her.

"Well, yes, Miss Watkins, so I was. I just stopped a minute to rest, you see," he explained, eyeing her distrustfully. Since her advent life had changed greatly for the janitor.

"I see Thomas, does that little lame boy come in this way?"

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"Jimmy? Yes, ma'am. 'Most always he does. In fact, that's why I keep the door unlocked."

"Well, after this I prefer that you should keep it locked. There is no reason why he should have a private entrance to the library that I can see; and anyway it's not safe. Some one might——"

"Oh, Lord, Miss Watkins, don't you worry. Nobody ever came in here yet, and I've been here eight years. Jimmy's all right. He's careful and still's a mouse, and he won't do a mite of harm. He comes in regular after school's out, and it's just like a home to him, you may say. He's all right."

Miss Watkins frowned.

"I have no doubt that he is a very estimable little boy," she said; "but you will please see that no one enters the library by this door. I see no reason for favouritism. You understand me, I hope."

And she returned to her work. The assistant, weary of her unprecedented labour, had laid aside the list of fines, and was openly crocheting. No sound of broom or lawn-mower proclaimed Thomas

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worthy of his hire, and Miss Watkins, vexed beyond the necessity of the case, labelled Fiction angrily, wondering why such a town as this needed a library, anyway.

Two little old ladies, plump and deprecatory, entered in a swish of fresh, cambric morning-dresses. One of them fumbled in her black-silk bag for a book, and leaning on the little gate, coughed lightly to attract the assistant's attention.

"Yes, indeed, Miss Mather, a lovely day. Sister and I enjoyed this very much. I don't know about what we'll take, exactly; it's so hard to tell. I always look and look, and the more I look the more anxious I get. It always seems as if everything was going to be too long, or else we've read it. You see we read a good deal. I wonder—do you know where the little boy is?"

Miss Mather smiled triumphantly. "You'll have to ask Miss Watkins," she said.

"The new librarian, my dear? Oh, I hardly like to disturb her. They say she's very strict. My cousin told me she charged her nine cents for a

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book that was out too long. You ask her, my dear!"

"Miss Watkins," said the assistant meekly, "there is a lady here would like to see Jimmy. Do you know where he is?"

"I do not," the librarian returned briefly. "Anything I can do——"

"Oh, no, not at all!" cried the flushed old lady, "not for the world! Don't disturb yourself, please —Miss—Miss—I'll just wait till he gets in. He picked this out for me. You see, he knows pretty well what we want. I always like something with a little travel in it, and sister won't hear of a book unless it ends well. And it spoils it so to look ahead. So the little fellow looks at the end, and sees if it's all right for sister, and then he assures me as to the travel—I like European travel best —and then we know it's all right. I'll just wait for him."

"I have no reason to suppose that he will be here," Miss Watkins said crossly.

"Oh, yes, he'll be here," the old lady returned comfortably. "He'll be here soon. We can wait."

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The librarian pressed her lips together and retired into her work. The minutes passed. Presently the outer door opened softly, and the irregular tap of a crutch was heard. Jimmy's head peered around the partition into the ante-room. The old ladies uttered a chirp of delight, and slipped out into the hall for a brief, whispered consultation, returning with a modest request for *Griffith Gaunt*, by Charles Reade." The elder of the two shut it carefully into her bag, remaking sociably, "I wanted to read the *Cloister and the Hearth*, by the same author, I'd heard there was so much travel in it, but he said sister never could bear the ending."

Going into the reading-room later, on some errand, the librarian was surprised to find the magazines neatly laid out in piles, the chairs straightened, the shades pulled level, and a fresh bunch of lilacs in the jar under the window. She guessed who had done it, but Jimmy was not to be seen. Once, during the next afternoon, she thought she saw a small, grey jacket disappearing into the waste-room, but much to her own

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surprise, forbore to make certain of it. During the next few days, when her time was entirely taken up with the catalogue in the front of the library, and the assistant transacted all business among the shelves, she was perfectly convinced that somewhere between sections A and K a little boy with a brown book was concealed, but found herself too busy to rout him out.

Even when a red-faced, liveried coachman presented her with a note, directed in a sprawling, childish hand to "Mr. Jimmy Reese, Esq.," she only coughed and said severely, "There is no such official in the library."

"It's just the little boy, ma'am, that's meant," the man explained deferentially. "Master Clarence is back for the summer—Mrs. Clarence Vanderhoof, ma'am—and he always sends a note to the little fellow. There was some book he mentioned to him last year as likely that he would enjoy, and Master Clarence wants it, if it's in. I was to give him the note."

"I will send a list of our juveniles to Mrs. Vanderhoof," said the librarian, in her most busi-

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ness-like manner, "and I will give you, for Master Clarence, the new Henty book. He will probably like that."

"I beg pardon, ma'am," persisted the coachman, "but Master Clarence says that there was a book that the little boy particularly recommended to him, and I was to be very special about it. He goes a good deal by the little fellow's judgment. I'll call in again when he's here, after my other errands."

Miss Watkins sighed, and gave way. "Will you see, Miss Mather, if Jimmy Reese is in the library?" she inquired, and Miss Mather, smiling, obeyed her.

He was never formally enfranchised, but he took up his place in the department of Travel and Adventure, and held it unchallenged. All the long, spring afternoons he sat there, throned on the books, leaning against them, banked safely in from the tumult of the world outside, a quiet little shadow among the shadowy throngs that filled the covers.

Whatever he might read, for he turned to other

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books as one travels, for the joy of coming home again, the old brown book lay open on his knees, and he patted the pages with one hand, absently, as his eyes travelled over the print. Sooner or later he came back to the yellowed leaves—perhaps to the story of Dryope.

"Now there was nothing left of Dryope but her face. Her tears still flowed and fell on her leaves, and while she could, she spoke. 'I am not guilty. I deserve not this fate. I have injured no one. If I speak falsely, may my foliage perish with drought and my trunk be cut down and burned. Take this infant and give it to a nurse. Let it often be brought and nursed under my branches, and play in my shade; and when he is old enough to talk, let him be taught to call me mother, and to say with sadness, "My mother lies hid under this bark." But bid him be careful of river-banks, and beware how he plucks flowers, remembering that every bush he sees may be a goddess in disguise. Farewell, dear husband and sister and father. If you retain any love for me, let not the axe wound me nor the flocks bite and tear my branches. Since

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I cannot stoop to you, climb up hither and kiss me; and while my lips continue to feel, lift up my child, that I may kiss him. I can speak no more, for already the bark advances up my neck, and will soon shoot over me. You need not close my eyes; the bark will soon close them without your aid.' Then the lips ceased to move, and life was extinct; but the branches retained, for some time longer, the vital heat."

In fancy he walked by that fatal stream. He saw the plant dripping blood—the flower that was the poor nymph Lotis. The terrible, beautiful revenge, the swift doom of those wonderful Greeks, that delights even while it horrifies, he felt to the fullest measure. He had no more need to read them than a priest his breviary, for he knew them all, but he followed the type in very delight of recognition.

Through the window came the strong scent of the purple lilacs, that grew all over the little New England town. Faint cries of children playing drifted in with the breeze. The organ in the church nearby crooned and droned a continual fugue.

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Someone was always practising there. The deep, bass notes jarred the air, even the little building trembled to them at times. And since it had been at this season of the year, when he had first found the book, the lovely broken myths, elusive sometimes, and as dim to his understanding as the marble fragments that still bewilder the enchanted artist, he always connected with that throbbing, mournful melody, that haunting lilac odour. Sometimes the organ swelled triumphantly and cried out in a mighty chorus of tone: at those times Ulysses shot down the false suitors, or Perseus, hovering over the shrieking sea-beast, rescued the white Andromeda. Sometimes a minor plaintive strain troubled him vaguely, and then he listened to poor Venus, bending in tears above the slain Adonis.

"'*Yet theirs shall be but a partial triumph; memorials of my grief shall endure, and the spectacle of your death, my Adonis, and of my lamentation, shall be annually renewed. Your blood shall be turned into a flower; that consolation none shall envy me.' Thus speaking, she sprinkled nectar on*

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the blood; and as they mingled, bubbles rose as in a pool, on which rain-drops fall, and in an hour's time there sprang up a flower of bloody hue, like that of the pomegranate. But it is short-lived."

The peculiar odour of much leather on pine shelves was confused, too, with the darling book. He had never read it elsewhere; he had not money enough for a library-ticket. Old Mr. Littlejohn, quickly recognising the invaluable services that this little acolyte might be counted upon to render, had readily granted him the freedom of the shelves, and smoked his pipe in peace for hours together, thereafter, in the back room, sure of his monitor in front.

Miss Watkins needed no such assistance, but she found herself, to her amazement, not wholly ungrateful for the many steps saved her by Jimmy's tactful service to the children. At first she would have none of it, and groups of shy boys and girls waited awkwardly and in vain before the little gate, hoping for a glimpse of their kindly counsellor. She thrust lists of juveniles into their unwilling hands, led them cautiously into an in-

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spection of Nature Lessons for Little Learners, displayed tempting rows of bound *St. Nicholas*—but to no purpose.

"Where's Jimmy?" they demanded stubbornly.

"What on earth do they want of him?" she asked of her assistant one day. "That stupid Meadows child—is she going to ask his opinion of the Dotty Dimple Books?"

"Not at all," Miss Mather replied tranquilly. "But he always gets her a Mary J. Holmes novel, and I stamp it and let it go. You always argue with her about it, and ask her if she wouldn't prefer something else—which she never would."

Little by little he grew to wait on the children as a matter of course. He was even allowed to keep the novels desired by the Meadows child in the juvenile shelf, where he insisted they belonged.

"Only the girls in Number Seven want 'em," he explained, when his superior complained of his audacity in removing them from adult fiction.

And so the little girl who had reached that

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period of little girlhood when every well-regulated young person is compelled by some inward power to ask the librarian, tremblingly, if she has a book in the libr'y called *St. Elmo*, was spared all embarrassment, for Jimmy handed it out to her almost before she asked.

Not that he lacked the discrimination to exercise a proper authority on occasion. Miss Watkins remembered long a surprising scene which she witnessed from the top of a ladder in the Biography and Letters Section. A shambling, unwholesome boy had asked Miss Mather in a husky voice for the works of Edgar A. Poe, and as she blew off the dust from the top and extended two fat volumes toward him, a rapid tapping heralded the youngest official.

"Don't you give 'em to him, don't you!" he cried, warningly. As she paused instinctively he shook his finger with a quaint, old-fashioned gesture at the boy.

"You ought to be ashamed, Sam Wheeler," he said reprovingly. "You shan't take those books a step. Not a step. If you think you're going to

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scare Susy to death you're mistaken. If you want to read 'em, come here and do it. But you aren't a-going to read 'em to her nights, again. So you go right off, now!"

Without a word Sam turned and left the library, and Miss Watkins from her ladder remonstrated feebly.

"Why, Jimmy, if that boy has a ticket you haven't any right——"

"Do you know what he does with those books, Miss Watkins?" replied the dauntless squire of dames. "He reads 'em after supper to his little sister Susy. That one where the house all falls down and the one where the lady's teeth come out and she carries 'em in her hand! And she don't dare take her feet off the rungs, she sits so still. And she don't go to sleep hardly ever. Do you s'pose I'd let him take 'em?"

The librarian threshed the matter over, and finally thought to stagger him by the suggestion that it would be difficult for him to ascertain the precise intention of everyone drawing out books. "How do you know," she asked, "that other peo-

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ple may not be frightening each other with various stories?"

"There aren't many fellows as mean as Sam Wheeler," he replied promptly, "and then I was sure that he was going to. I happened to know."

She turned again to her work and he went back to his corner, the brown book under his arm.

The syringa was out now, and the mournful, sweet odour blew in from the bushes around the church. In the still June air he could hear the bees buzzing there. He turned the beloved pages idly. Should it be poor Psyche, so sweet and foolish, or Danaë, the lovely mother, hushing her baby in the sea-tossed chest? He found the place of Proverbial Expressions at the back of the book, and read them with a never-failing interest. Around them he wove long stories to please himself.

"*Their faces were not all alike, nor yet unlike, but such as those of sisters ought to be.*"

This one always pleased him—he could not have said why.

"*Here lies Phäton, the driver of his father's*

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chariot, which if he failed to manage, yet he fell in a great undertaking."

The simple grandeur of this one was like the trumpet tone of the organ. He thrilled to it delightedly.

The third he murmured to himself, entranced by the very sound of the words:

"*He falls, unhappy, by a wound intended for another; looks up to the skies, and dying remembers sweet Argos.*"

Ah, why would Thomas never consent to the witchery of these words:

"——*and dying remembers sweet Argos.*"

He sighed delightedly and dreamed into the dusk. Almost he thought he had known that man, almost he remembered sweet Argos. . . .

In the middle of June the Vanderhoof's coachman brought bad news: Master Clarence was quite ill. No one knew what it was exactly, but if there was any exceptionally fine book that Jimmy could suggest, he'd be glad to be read to from it.

For the first time the little librarian parted from his darling.

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"If you'll be especially careful of it, William, and I've put in slips of paper at the best ones. And as soon as he gets better, I'd be glad if he'd send it back—if he's through with it."

The days seemed long without it. The heat was intense, and when Miss Mather stayed at home a day or two, and all the summer people came in for books, he had a great deal to do. Miss Watkins was very glad of his help, now.

One hot Saturday afternoon he did not return to the library, but began a resolute journey to the Vanderhoof's big house on the hill. It was almost two miles, and he went slowly; now and then he stopped to rest on the stone horse-blocks. It took him an hour to get there, and at the door he had to stop to wipe his forehead and get his breath.

"I came to ask how Clarence was," he said to the maid.

"He's better, thank you, but it's dreadful sick he's been. 'Twas scarlet fever, dear," she answered, with a pitying glance at the crutch. "Not that you need be worried, for the half of the house is shut off, and we've not been near it," she added.

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"I'm glad he's better, and—and is he through with the book?" he asked eagerly.

"The book? What book is it, my dear? Sure the nurse does be reading a hundred books to him."

"A brown book: Stories of Gods and Heroes. I—I'd like it, if he's through with it. I stay at the libr'y, and I sent it to him—" he sank on the step, exhausted.

The kind-hearted girl dragged him into the hall. "Come out with me, dear, and get a glass of cold milk," she said. "You've walked too far."

Seated on a chair in the kitchen, his eyes closed, he heard, as in a dream, his friend's voice raised in dispute with some distant person.

"And I say he shall have it, then. Walking all this way! And him lame, too! Tell Emma to put it on the tray, and leave it in the hall. The child's well enough now, anyway. I'll go get it myself—I'm not afraid. The whole of us had the fever, and no such smelling sheets pinned up, and no fuss at all, at all. I'm as good as a paid nurse, any day, if you come to that. A book'll hurt no one."

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Later he found himself perched beside the coachman, who was going to meet a train, the beloved book tight in his arms. He fingered it lovingly; he smelled the leaves like a little dog. For the first time in his life he took it to his home, and clasped it in his arms as he lay in bed.

For days he did not appear, and it was Thomas, the janitor, who went finally to look him up, troubled by the children's reports of his illness. He returned grave-faced.

"It's the fever, Miss Watkins, and they say there's little chance for him, the poor little feller! He was worn out with the heat. They don't know how he got it. He's out of his mind. To think of Jimmy like that!"

The librarian's heart sank, and her assistant put her head on her arms and cried. Thomas sat sadly on his little porch, his unlighted pipe in his mouth. The library seemed strangely empty.

The little Meadows girl brought them the news the next morning.

"Jimmy's dead," she said abruptly. "He got it from a book up at the Vanderhoof's. His aunt

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feels awful bad. It was a libr'y book. They say he held it all the time."

The librarian put away the book in her hand, envying the younger woman her facile tears. She was not imaginative, but she realised dimly for a moment that this little boy had known more of books, had got more from them, than she, with all her catalogues.

They sat together, she, Miss Mather, and Thomas, a strange trio, at the simple funeral service in the church nearby. So far as daily living went, they were as near to him as the aunt who cared for him.

Coming back to the library, they lingered awhile in the reading-room, trying to realise that it was all over, and that that little, quick tapping would never be heard again among the books. At last Thomas spoke:

"It don't seem right," he said thickly, "it don't seem right nor fair. Here he was, doting on that book so, tugging it round, just living on it, you might say, and it turned on him and killed him. Gave it up, and a sacrifice it was, too—I know—

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and as a reward, it killed him. Went back to get it, brought it home, took it to bed—and it killed him. It's like those things he'd tell me out of it—they all died; seemingly without any reason, the gods would go back on 'em, and they'd die. He's often read it out to me."

"It will be lovely to have that Children's-room memorial," said Miss Mather, softly, "with all the books and pictures and the little chairs. It was beautiful in Mrs. Vanderhoof, I think. It wasn't her fault. I wish—I wish we'd had a little chair in there for Jimmy."

The librarian got up abruptly and moved around among the magazines, a mist before her eyes. Only now did she realise how she had grown to love him.

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THE MAID OF THE MILL

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THE MAID OF THE MILL

I

"THE only objection I have to ghost stories," said young Sanford, "is from a literary point of view. They're so badly done, you know."

"In what way?" said the clerk of the hotel, settling back in his office chair, and smiling at young Sanford and the circle of men who had come down for their keys from the billiard-room.

"Well, in this way. I'm not considering the little harmless stories where the heroes are only frightened, or even those where their heads are grey in the morning. I'm thinking of those where they never live to tell the awful tale, you know; the ones in which they tell their friends to come if they call, and then they never call; the ones in which, although they scream and scream, nobody hears them.

"And yet the old trembling man who points them to the haunted room knows perfectly well that five men have entered that room on five nineteenths of

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October, and never come out alive. Yet he only warns them, or at most only beseeches them not to go in. He has no police force—not that police could seriously harm the ghosts, but somehow they never appear to the police; he does not arrange with the victim's friend to burst in the door at twelve-thirty, anyhow, whether they are summoned or not; he doesn't—but then, what do any of them do that they might be expected to? And all this forced condition of things so that the ghost may have all the evening to work quietly in. Do you mean to tell me that if I were frightened to the extent of grey hair in the morning, I couldn't scream loud enough to be heard any distance?"

This speech drew nods of approval from several of the men. "I've thought of that, too," said the clerk. In a dark corner behind the stove sat a man, hunched over his knees, silent, and apparently unknown to any of the others. At this point he looked up, cleared his throat, and said in a strange, husky voice:

"Do you really suppose that that is anything else than nonsense?" Young Sanford flushed.

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"Sir"—he began. The other continued in his rough, thick voice:

"Do you suppose they don't try to scream? Do you suppose they don't *think* they're screaming?"

A little silence of discomfort fell on the circle. There was something disagreeably suggestive in the question. Suddenly the man spoke again.

"I had a friend," he said, "in fact, I had two friends. One was young—about your age," nodding to Sanford. "The other was older. He was not so clever nor so attractive nor so brilliant nor so jolly as the younger, but he had a characteristic—perhaps his only one—for he was a very ordinary man. He had an iron will. His determination was as unbreakable as anything human could be. And he was devoted to his friend, who, somehow, loved him. I don't know why, because he had so many other admirers—but he stuck to his friend—Joan. They called the two Darby and Joan. Their real names were not unlike those, and it was rather funny. Darby used to talk as you were talking, sir," he nodded again to Sanford, "and he was sure, cock sure, that what he said was right. He

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would tell what things were possible and what were not, and prove what he said very nicely. Joan wasn't clever, but he knew that it does no good to call a thing impossible. He knew, in fact, that nothing is more possible than the most impossible things."

The man coughed and cleared his throat and waited a moment as if to see whether he were intruding. No one spoke, so he went on.

"One day Darby rushed into Joan's study and told him of a haunted mill he'd discovered. It was one of the old mills where the farmers used to bring their sacks before the big concerns in the West swallowed all the little trades. It was dusty and cobwebbed and broken down and unused and haunted. And there was a farmhouse directly across the road and a house on either side of it not a hundred feet away.

"'Was it always haunted?' asked Joan. 'No,' said Darby, 'only once a year.' On Christmas eve every year for nineteen years there had appeared, late at night, a little light in one of the windows; and that side of the house had an odd look, some-

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how it seemed to look fresher and newer, and at one o'clock or so a horrible piercing shriek would ring out from the mill, and then a kind of crashing fall, and then all was still, and the light would disappear.

"'Had nobody investigated?' Oh, yes. The first year it was noticed was when houses were built up around it. It used to stand away from everything else, and the miller and his family lived there. Then, long after they were dead, people moved out there and heard the noises and saw the light. They thought of tramps and escaped criminals and everything one suggests till it had occurred too repeatedly for that, and then a young farmer went over one Christmas eve, not telling any one, and they found him roaming about the mill, a hopeless wreck the next day; he had gone quite mad.

"And the next year a man came up from the city, and his friends were in the next room to help him if he called, and he didn't call, and they were afraid to startle him by knocking, so they got a ladder and peeped into the window at ten

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minutes to one, and he lay peacefully on the bed with his eyes closed and his hands stretched loosely out, and they thought it was a great joke that he should sleep through it, so they went home, and in the morning they found him in horrible convulsions, and he never recovered.

"And there were two young divinity students that went once together, and they had a crowd along with instructions to break in the door at one exactly. And at the stroke of one the crowd beat in the great door and burst into an empty room! They had gone up a flight too far, somehow, and as they stood staring at each other, from the room beneath them came a dreadful shriek and a crash, and when they rushed down they found the boys in a dead faint. They brought them to and got them home, and they muttered nonsense about a dog and a sash and would say no more. And they escaped with severe nervous prostration. But later they lost what little nerve they had and couldn't sleep at night, and joined the Catholic Church, because they said that there were things they found it difficult to reconcile. . . .

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"'And what was the story of it all?' asked Joan. Oh, the story was disagreeable enough. The miller's daughter wanted to marry a poor young man, but her father would not let her. And she refused to accept his rich nephew. So he locked her in her room till she should consent. And she stayed there a week. And one night the nephew came home late and saw a tiny light in her window, and presently he saw some one place a ladder and go softly up, and the miller's daughter leaned out and helped him in. So he told her father, who came into her room the next night with a bloodhound, and bound her to the bed and hushed her cries with her sash, and lit the little light. And when her lover had climbed the ladder—the dog was there. And that was Christmas eve.

"'Do the people suffer this without complaint —these deaths and convulsions and apostasies?' asked Joan. Well, no. But if they destroyed the mill a liquor saloon would go up immediately. The proprietor was simply waiting. And they didn't want that. So they kept it quiet. And nobody need go there. Nobody had been alarmed or hurt except

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the meddlers. And in villages the people have less scientific curiosity. But Darby was going immediately. It was December twenty-third now. Joan must come, too; it would be most exciting. Joan argued against it, but he too was curious, so they agreed to go. And the next day they went."

II

By this time the circle was absolutely silent, concentrated to ears and eyes. They stared and leaned towards the shadowy corner behind the stove where the dimly defined figure crouched. The clerk got up and turned down the gas, which flared in his face, and the room was almost wholly dark. The man spoke in a dull, mechanical way, as one speaks who clears his mind, once for all. At intervals he waited fully ten seconds to rest his voice, strangely impressive, with its strained, choked tones.

"The next day they went," he repeated. "Darby was not only clever—he was extremely sensitive. Ridicule was unbearable to him. And though he was a literary fellow, and artistic and all that, he

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was practical, too, for all he was so brilliant and winning. It actually troubled him that people should believe anything but what he called 'the strictly logical,' and he thought Joan's ideas far too flexible and credulous. It was really for Joan's sake, he said in joke, whom he rather suspected of spiritualistic leanings, that he intended to make the excursion into the country. And he would tell nobody. He would make no inquiries. He would conduct the search along somewhat unusual lines, he declared. One of them should sleep in the room. At one o'clock precisely the other should quietly mount a ladder fixed just where the mythical ladder had been and enter the room in that way, thus preventing any mischievous practical jokes from without, and insuring help to the man within, should he need it.

"And Joan agreed to this. He was interested himself, and he'd have been as eager and scornful as Darby if it hadn't occurred to him—for he was a terribly literal fellow—that four tragedies, sad as these had been, and all unexplained, couldn't be accounted for by chance nor made less sad even

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by a good logician like Darby. So he suggested one or two friends to fall back upon in case of foul play of any kind. And Darby looked at him and laughed a little sneering laugh and called him——" The man choked and bent lower. He seemed to be unable to speak for some seconds. Then he hurried on, speaking from this point very rapidly and using a kind of clumsy gesture that brought the scenes he spoke of strangely clear to the men around him.

"He called him a coward. So Joan agreed to go. And on the afternoon of the day before Christmas they took a long ladder and a lantern and some sandwiches and two revolvers and drove in a butcher's cart to the little village. And Joan was as eager as Darby that no one should know. You see, Darby called him a coward.

"They slipped into the old, dingy mill at dusk, and went over it with the greatest thoroughness. Everything was open and empty. Only the corner bedroom and one of the living rooms were furnished at all. The dust lay thick in the mill proper, but the living rooms were singularly free

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from it. Darby noticed this and remarked it to Joan. 'It doesn't smell half so musty, either,' he said. 'I'm glad of that. I hate old, musty smells.'

"Then a queer, crawly feeling came over Joan, and he said: 'Darby, let's go home. Life's short enough, heaven knows. If anything——' And then Darby told him once for all that if he wanted to go home he might, and otherwise he might shut up.

" 'Do you want it dusty and smelly?' said he.

" 'Yes,' said Joan, 'I do. I don't see why it isn't, either. It's just as old and just as deserted as the other part.'

" 'You might get a little dust from the other side and scatter it about,' said Darby, and before Joan could reply he had scooped a handful of dry, brown dust from the bagroom of the mill and laid it about on the bureau and chairs of the bedroom. 'Now come out for our last patrol,' he said. They went out and studied the mill carefully. As they came around to the house side, keeping carefully in the shadow, Joan looked surprised

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and pointed to the door by which they had entered.

"'That door's shut,' he said.

"'Well?' asked Darby.

"'We left it ajar.'

"'Oh, the wind!' said Darby, and went up to the door softly, listening for any escaping joker. He rattled the knob and pushed it inward, but the door did not yield. 'Why, you couldn't have left it ajar,' he said, 'it's locked!'

"Joan stared at the house, wondering if it was possible that the window-panes really shone so brightly. And the cobwebs about the blinds, where were they? He could have sworn that the porch was full of dead leaves and sticks when they went in—it was as clean as his hand now.

"'We'll go in by the window, the broken one, at the back,' he said quietly. They went around the house and hunted for the broken window, but did not find it. The window was not only whole but locked. Then Joan set his teeth.

"'The broken window must have been at the mill side,' he said, 'we'll go there.' So they went around

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and clambered in by a paneless window and went to the bedroom. The room was dim, but they could distinguish objects fairly well. Darby looked queerly at Joan.

" 'So you cleared away the dust,' he asked.

" 'What dust?' asked Joan. Then he followed Darby's eyes, and where the little piles of brown dust had lain were only clean, bare boards.

"Outside, the teams of the home-coming farmers rolled by. A dog barked, and now a child called. But they seemed far away—in another country. Where the two young fellows stood, there was a strange lonely belt of silence.

" 'Perhaps I brushed the chair as we went out,' said Darby slowly. But he looked at Joan queerly.

"They took their supper, and then Joan announced his intention of staying in the room while Darby patrolled the house, and climbed the ladder at one. At first Darby demurred. He had planned to stay. But Joan was inflexible. It was utterly useless to argue with him, so Darby agreed. If Joan wanted help he was to call. At eleven and twelve Darby was to climb the ladder and look in,

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and at one he was to come in, whatever the situation. At the slightest intimation of danger of any kind Joan was to fire his revolver and Darby was to call for help and rush up the ladder. For all that the people were so quiet round about, they were probably uneasy—they knew that things might happen on the night before Christmas.

"Joan sat for some time after Darby had left him, staring about the room. It was simply furnished with a large bed, a table, and two deal chairs. Thrown over the bed was a moth-eaten blanket, checked white and red. Joan swept it off from the bed and shook it, closing his eyes instinctively to avoid the dust. But no dust came. He shook it again. It was as fresh and clean as his handkerchief. He threw it back on the bed and looked out at Darby walking quietly around in the shadow.

"He was glad Darby was out there. He got to thinking of ghosts and strange preparations for their coming. The boards of the window creaked, and he gasped and stared, only to see Darby's face at the window. 'Anything happened?' he

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signalled. Joan shook his head. It must be eleven o'clock. How was it possible? The time had seemed so short. He stared at a big star till his eyes swam. He felt dull and drowsy. He had sat up late the night before, and he needed sleep.

"A thought came to him, and it seemed somehow very original and striking. He tapped on the pane to Darby.

" 'I'll lie down and take a little nap,' he whispered, opening the window softly. 'You can call me at twelve.' Darby nodded.

" 'How do you feel, old fellow? All right?' he asked."

The man choked again and was silent for a time. The strain was growing. The men waited for something to happen as one awaits the falling of the red, snapping embers.

"Joan lay down in that bed," said the stranger hoarsely, and from this point he hurried on almost too quickly for clearness, "on that hideous checked blanket, and fell asleep. He fell asleep thinking of Darby's words and how thoughtful they were: 'How do you feel, old fellow? All right?'

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"He had bad dreams. He dreamed a woman stood at the foot of the bed and stared at him and motioned him to go. And she was an unnatural woman. She kept changing colour, from red to yellow, from yellow to cream colour, from cream colour to white, from white to—ah! she was a dead woman!

"She motioned him to go, but he refused. She came to the side of the bed and took off her long red sash and bound him down. Then he was willing to go indeed, and strained his muscles in useless efforts to break away, but she laughed at him and then breathed in his face till her damp, icy breath chilled his very soul—and he woke, covered with the sweat of terror—to see her standing at the foot of the bed, looking, looking into his staring eyes!

III

"So it was true. There were such things. But at least his limbs were free, and to his joy he discovered that he was not afraid. No; he had a dull feeling of coming disaster, but no fear. She was

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a young woman, with big shadowy eyes and a strange mouth. She had on a long, loose white night-gown, open at the throat, and she carried a little lamp. 'Go!' he saw in her eyes as plainly as if she said it. He looked about the room—he could have sworn it was changed. It had the air of a woman's room, that she is living in and keeps her things in. He had no right there—none. He should have gone. But he was proud because he wasn't afraid, and he answered her with his eyes that he would not go. A tired, puzzled look came into her face, a kind of frown, and she leaned over the footboard and begged him with those big dark eyes, begged him hard to go. He had his chance—oh, yes, the fool had his chance!

"But he was so proud that he could master her, master a returned soul—for lovely as she was, he knew she wasn't human—that he only set his teeth and started up to come nearer her. But she raised her hand and he fell back, feeling queer and drowsy. Then she came to the edge of the bed and sat down and took from behind her a soft red silk sash and drew it across his face. A sweet, languid

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feeling stole over him; the bed seemed like a cloud of down, her sash smelled like spice and sandalwood in a warm wind. He felt he was being drugged and weakened, and he tried to stumble up, but the soft silk smothered him, and he became almost unconscious.

"He only wanted one thing—to feel her fingers touch his face and to hold her long brown hair. And while she drew the sash across his mouth he stretched out his hands on either side to catch it and reach her fingers. There was nothing ghostly about her—she was only a lovely dream-woman. Maybe he was asleep. . . .

"And then she pulled the sash away, and he caught her eye and awoke with a start—her look was full of triumph. She didn't beg him any longer. This was no helpless, gentle spirit of a woman; this was a weird elemental creature; she hadn't any soul or any pity; something made her act out all this dreadful tragedy, without any regard for human life or reason. He knew somehow that she couldn't help his weakness; that though in some fiendish way she had bound him hand and foot,

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she did it not of herself, but in obedience to some awful law that she couldn't help any more than he. And then he began to be afraid. Slowly great waves of horror rose and grew and broke over him. He tried to move his feet and hands, but he could not so much as will the muscles to contract. He strained till the drops stood on his forehead, but still his arms lay stretched motionless across the bed.

"Just then he met her eyes again, and his heart sank, they were so mocking and bitter. 'Fool! fool!' they said. They were so malignant, and yet so impersonal—he could have sworn that she was afraid too. What was to happen? Would she kill him? His tongue was helpless. He worked his lips weakly, but they made no words. And she turned down her mouth scornfully and played with the sash. Why did she wait? For she was waiting for a time to come—her eyes told that. What was that time? A great joy that Darby was safe outdoors came to him, and he remembered that Darby would come at twelve! He would break the spell. And just then she left the bed and bent down over the little

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lamp, and when she took it up it was lighted. She moved across to the window and set it in the sill. Then she glided to the door and locked it. Joan heard the bolt slip.

"Steps sounded on the ladder outside. Into Joan's half-dulled thought came a kind of comfort. Darby was coming. Some one knocked on the pane and the window was raised from the outside.

" 'Joan! Joan!' whispered Darby, 'are you all right? Why did you light the lamp? Where are you?' And then Joan, the fool, forgot that if he had not answered, Darby would surely have come in. It seemed to him that if he did not speak now, he was lost. He strained his throat to say four words—only four: 'All right. Come in.' Just that. The first two to reassure Darby, the second to bring him. He made a mighty effort. 'All—all right!' he shouted, 'c—c—,' and then her eyes were on him and he faded into unconsciousness. He saw in them a terror and surprise. He understood that she wondered at his speaking. There was a stinging pain in his throat, and he heard Darby whisper angrily,

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"'Keep still, can't you? Don't howl so! It's quarter to one. I looked in at twelve, and didn't want to wake you. You'd better get up now—who's that down there?' and with a sickening despair he heard Darby hurry down the ladder.

"The leaves rustled a little and then all was still. He didn't struggle any longer. It was clear to him now. He was to play the lover in this ill-fated tragedy, whose actors offered themselves, fools that they were, unasked, each time. And what happened to the lover? Why, he was killed. Well, rather that he should die than Darby. It seemed to him so reasonable, now. No one had asked him to suffer. He had had his chance to go and refused it. No one could help him now. Not even she. They must play it out, puppets of an inexorable drama.

"And then the girl dashed to the bed, and sank beside it as if to pray. And he felt her hair on his face, as he had hoped, but it brought no joy to him. For something was coming up from the floor below. Something that sent a thrill before it, that advanced, slowly, slowly, surely. The girl shuddered and grasped the bed and tried to pull her-

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self up, but she sank helplessly back. And slowly the bolt of the door pushed back. No one pushed it, but it slipped back. Then slowly, inch by inch, the door opened. Joan grew stiff and cold, and would not have looked but that his eyes were fixed. Wider, wider, till it stood flat against the wall.

"Then up the stairs came steps. And with them others, quick and pattering. What was that? Who walked so quickly, with padding, thudding feet? He longed for them to come in—he dreaded their coming. The door was ready for them. The room was swept and clean.

"Up, up, they came, the heavy steps and the scratching, pattering feet. Nearer, nearer—they came in. The man, large, dark, heavy-jawed; the stone-grey, snarling hound, licking its frothing jaws, straining at its chain. The girl writhed against the bed in terror—she opened her lips, but with a stride the man was upon her, his heavy hand was over her mouth. He dragged her up, shaking and sinking, he snatched the sash and bound her mouth, he held her at arm's length

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and stared once in her eyes. Scorn and rage and murder were in his.

"Joan forgot his own danger in terrified pity. He struggled a moment, but it was useless. His dreadful bonds still held. The man came to the bed, dragging the hound, and Joan shut his eyes, not to see the dark evil face. He would die in the dark, alone, unaided. Oh! to call once! To hear a human voice! But there was no sound but the panting of the great, eager dog.

"The man seemed not to see him. He seized the girl, and turning her toward the light that burned at the pane, he bound her to the bed-post with the silken sash. She writhed and bent and tried to grasp his feet; she pleaded with her eyes till their agony cut Joan like a knife, but the man tied her straight and fast. Then he walked to the pane and crouched down by it and held the dog's muzzle, and became like a stone image.

"And suddenly it flashed across Joan's mind, with a passion of fear to which all that had gone before was as nothing, that Darby was coming up that ladder to that light! Darby, whom he had

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thought so safe, was to come unknowing, unwarned, to that straining, panting beast. He turned faint for a moment. And then with all the power of his soul he tried to scream. He felt his throat strain and bend and all but burst with the tremendous effort. He tried again, and the pain blinded him. At his feet there the girl strained and twisted, great tears rolling down her cheeks. And yet there was a ghastly silence. The stifled panting of that hound echoed in a deadly quiet. It was horrible, pitiful! The girl's white gown was torn and mussed; her soft naked shoulder quivered when she strained against the cruel sash. He could see that her arm was red where it was tied.

"She trembled and bent and bit her lip till the blood stained her chin. He cursed and prayed and shrieked till the sound, had it come, would have deafened him—but it was all a ghastly mockery! It was as still as a quiet summer afternoon—and the dog and the man waited at the window.

"There was a sound of scraping. Someone was coming up the ladder—someone who whistled

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softly under his breath, and came nearer every moment. Up, up—the ladder rattled against the window-frame. The man at the window slipped his hand slowly, slowly from the dog's muzzle. The dog stiffened and drew back his black, dripping jaws from his yellow teeth. The man's fingers sunk in the beast's wrinkled neck and he held him back, while he threw one look of hate and triumph at the tortured woman behind him.

"The man bound to the bed couldn't bear it any longer. As a hand grasped the window-sill from outside, he summoned all his iron will, and with a rasping, rending effort that brought a sickly, warm taste to his mouth, he gave a hoarse cry.

"Then the woman leaned over till the sash sunk into her soft flesh, and shrieked with a high, shrill note that cut the air like a knife. But even as she shrieked, a form rose over the sill, there was a rush from inside, and their voices were drowned in a cry of terror, a scream so broken and despairing that Joan could not recognise the voice. And then there was a horrid crashing fall, and the light went out, and something snapped in the brain of

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the man chained to the bed, and he dropped for miles into a deep, black gulf."

There was a dead silence in the room. No one dared to speak. The stranger's voice had quavered and broken, and in a hoarse whisper he said, rising and stumbling to the door while they made way for him silently:

"And when he knew his friends again, Darby had been buried a long time. Joan did not know whether a broken neck is so much worse than anything else in the world. He hadn't any curiosity about the mill—he didn't care to hear the details of how they burned it to the ground. Perhaps after a while he will be too tired to contradict ignorant people. But he thinks—he has said, that when a man has not slept five hours in a week, nor spoken for days together without agony, much may be forgiven him in the line of intolerance of other people's ignorance—a blessed ignorance gentlemen, a blessed ignorance."

The door closed behind him and the men drew a long breath. No one turned out the gas and it

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burned till morning, for they took their keys in silence and went upstairs, for the most part arm in arm, haunted by the hoarse, rough voice of the stranger, whom they never saw again.

And indeed they did not care to see him. "For what could one say?" as young Sanford demanded, the next day. "It either happened, or it didn't. If it didn't, he can say no more; if it did, then he is right, and we are in blessed ignorance." And no one of the circle but nodded and looked for a moment at the chair behind the stove.

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THE TWILIGHT GUESTS

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THE TWILIGHT GUESTS

WHEN they left him, in the warm, late afternoon, lying listless on his couch in the porch, they thought he would stay alone there till they came again. His little granddaughter, indeed, felt so sad at deserting him that she ran back and kissed him twice. "To leave Grandpapa alone!" she said. But he was not alone; there came to him strange guests and sweet. And this was the manner of their coming.

As he watched the shadow creeping up the steps, he thought how often he had marked the time by it in the far away days. He remembered how he had tried to keep in the broad sunbeam that lay along the walk, when he used to run home to supper tired and hungry, shouting to his mother that his school was over and out and that he had come —"So hungry, mother dear!" And as he thought of her, slow tears crept from under his old eyelids, and he raised his hand feebly to wipe them

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away. When he saw clearly again, he started slightly, for up the path, walking in the sunbeam, came a boy. He smiled sweetly, cheerily at the old man, and sat down confidingly, close to the couch. "It is so warm in the sun!" he said.

The old man turned uneasily and looked at him. "Are you Arthur's son?" he asked doubtfully. "My eyes are so dim—I cannot always tell you apart, at first. Are you Arthur's son?"

"No," said the child.

"Are you——" but then the boy looked full in his face and the old man could not take his eyes from that searching smile. And as he looked, there grew around his heart the sweet faint breath of lilac trees, though it was early autumn and not at all the spring. And deep in the child's eyes was so strange a soul—yet so familiar! As he looked yet deeper the lilac scent grew stronger and he dared not turn away his eyes, lest he should lose it. So he listened to the child, who spoke brightly yet gravely, with his head resting against the old man's knee.

"See!" he said, "the lilacs are all out! I took

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a bunch to school, and the teacher wore them in her dress. Oh, but I grow tired of the school in the mornings, when the birds sing under the window! The brook is all full with the flood water, do you know?"

"Yes," said the old man dreamily, "yes, I know."

"There are pickerel there—I saw one, anyway!" said the boy. "The old one—he lives under the stone all alone. If I could get him, I'd be proud enough! But I never can—I can only catch him on a Friday night when the moon is full, and then I'm not allowed out! The man that weeds the garden told me that. Do you remember?"

"Yes, I remember," said the old man.

"But if I don't fish, I don't care so much," said the boy happily. "For I get so wet and dirty, and Rachel doesn't like me then. I can't look on her book. She is so dear! She never spots the ink on her apron, like the other girls. And she never eats fish, either. She thinks it hurts them too much to kill them. I don't think so—do you? But girls are different."

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"Where are you going to-night?" said the old man, quietly, yet his voice trembled.

"I'm going to sing to Rachel's grandfather. He's blind, you know."

"Yes," said the old man, "and old. His hair is white. He walks with a cane. But he loves the singing."

"Then to-morrow I must go to church," said the boy. "The minister talks and prays and I get so sleepy. But mother keeps a peppermint for me, just before the second hymn. Then I have it for the long prayer. And I can sing the hymns. Rachel never looks at me, she sits so still in church. And she won't play on Sunday. I can have my whip and two of the largest marbles. Do you think that is wrong?"

"No," said the old man, "I don't think that is wrong."

"And we have gingerbread on the porch in the afternoon," said the boy, "and Rachel comes. Mother says children must not be vexed at the Lord's Day."

"Yes," said the old man, "mother is so good to

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us—so good——" and when he saw clearly again, the child was gone. Only the shadow lay upon the upper step of the porch, and the sunbeam was shrunken to a narrow path of light.

He stretched out his trembling hands and called sorrowfully to the boy. "Come back! O come back! I had forgotten so much! And the lilacs——" but he was alone. And his hair was almost white. He covered his face with his hands and shivered. For the shadow was creeping up the porch.

And then over his chilled heart there came the breath of roses—summer roses. The air struck warm and soft upon his cheeks. And when he dropped his hands there stood in the sun-ray a straight tall youth. His eyes were shining with strength; his smile was happiness itself. In his firm brown hands he held roses—summer roses. The old man forgot to be afraid and raised himself on the cushions.

"Give them to me—give them!" he cried. The young man laughed low and laid the red flowers softly up against the withered cheeks. Then he sat down and took the cold, dry hands in his.

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"What do they make you remember?" he said.

The old man sighed for pure joy. "Ah, how sweet—how heavenly sweet! Did they come from the garden behind her father's house?"

"Yes," said the youth, "from the old bush near the wall. It was moonlight, and we picked them together. I reached the highest ones, because Rachel is not tall. She wore——"

"She wore the white gown with the big shade hat," said the old man eagerly. "And I made a wreath for her shoulders. I called her—what did I call her? The queen—the queen "—

"The queen of roses," said the youth.

"Ah, yes, the queen of roses!" said the old man. "Her mouth was like the pink, young buds. We went up and down the long paths, and I wanted her to take my arm."

"But she would not," laughed the young man. "She said that old folks might lean, but she could run as well as any man!"

"So she ran through the garden, and I after!" cried the old man, crushing the roses till they filled the porch with sweetness. "She hid behind

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the old elm and let me call and call. And I had to find her in the moonshadows. You know she grew afraid and cried out when I caught her? And yet she knew I would. But women are so. Her mother knew I was with her, so she let us stay till it was late. Rachel's mother was kind to me, you know?"

"Yes," said the young man. "But she knew that Rachel——"

"Ah!" said the old man quickly, "it seems they all knew! All but Rachel and me! Now that is so strange. For we should have known it first. But Rachel laughed so when I tried to tell her, she said—what was it she said?"

"That you were too young to know how you would think of it later," said the youth.

"And I said, 'I'm old enough to know I love you, Rachel, now and for ever!'" said the old man softly, clasping his hands together so that the roses dropped to the ground. "And then she did not laugh at all, but only held her head down so I could not see her eyes, and would not speak."

"It was so still," said the youth. "There was

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no breeze, and everything in the garden listened, listened, for what she would say."

"But nothing in the garden could hear," said the old man eagerly, "because she only whispered!"

"Was it then that her mother called?" asked the youth.

"Yes," said the old man, and he smiled. "But we did not come, for Rachel was afraid to go. She thought her mother would not like to have her leave the old home. And she feared to tell her that she wanted to go. So we sat like silly children in the dark. You see, I was afraid, too. Her father and mother were old, and old people cannot know how we feel when love first comes to us —and yet they loved, once!"

"Yes, they loved once," said the youth, "but they forget. They think of lands and money and the most prudent course—they cannot feel their heart's blood rushing through their veins, surging in their ears, 'She loves me!' They cannot feel that one hour with her is dearer than years with the others of the world!"

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"And then we went in!" said the old man softly. "Then we went in! And her mother stood waiting for us. Rachel would not look up and I had to lead her by the hand. She feared that we could not make it plain, that her mother would scold us——"

The youth laughed aloud. "But did she?" he said.

And the old man laughed too.

"No. She came to me and kissed me and then she held Rachel and cried. But not that she was sorry. Older people feel strange when the younger ones start away, you see."

The young man picked up the roses and laid them again by the side of the couch. "Sleep," he said softly, "and dream of her!" And the old man's eyelids drooped and the hands that held the roses relaxed in quiet sleep.

When he awoke the sun had almost set. The path of rays had faded and the creeping shadow had covered the highest step and lay along the porch. He felt feebly for the roses, but they were gone. And the sweet warm scent of them was only

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in his dim memory. But there sat in the shadow a man.

Threads of grey were in his hair and lines around his firm mouth. But in his eyes shone yet a sweet strength, and he held his head high as he spoke.

"Do you know where I have been?" he said.

The old man shook his head.

"Think!" said the other.

Then while he looked into the stranger's eyes, there stole across his heart the wind that blows through the orchard when the fruit is ripe. He drew in great breaths of it, in doubt, and at last he said in a whisper so low that he hardly heard himself, "You have been to his grave—his little grave!"

"Yes," said the man, "I have. His mother goes there alone—not even I go with her. She goes alone."

"No," said the old man solemnly, "no. God goes with her. I thought that she would have died —why did she live?"

"Because," said the other, "because you would

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have been alone. And you could not have kept yourself a man, if she had gone, too."

"Ah, yes!" said the old man softly, "that is it. She is an angel! When he was born I was almost afraid. I said, 'My son! I have a son! If I should die to-night, he would live and I should live in him!' And when she brought him herself into the orchard—I see her now—I see her now!"

He could not lift his head from the pillow, he was so tired and weak, but with his eyes he begged the other to come nearer. The man came close to the couch and looked down tenderly at the old man. "She wore the white trailing gown," he said.

"Yes," whispered the old man, "and the great wide hat. And she held him up under the brim and said that if it should rain, she and he could keep dry together, but I must stay in the rain!"

"Do you remember," said the other, "how when he could just say words, you played with him under the apple tree?"

"Can I ever forget?" said the old man. "But now the angels teach him a better language, so that he had but one to learn!"

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"Do you remember how she left him with her mother and went away with you?" said the other.

The old man smiled a little. "Ah, yes! Well enough!" he said. "We thought we would be young again, and leave him to his grandmother and his sisters. He had enough care! It was not lack of that——"

"And when you had gone only a few miles she grew anxious——"

"Yes, yes!" said the old man. "She said, 'Suppose he is sick? Suppose he falls into the brook? He walks about so brave and strong—and he is our only son!' So we came back."

"You were good to her," said the other. "You did always just as she wished."

"I loved her," said the old man simply.

The stranger's eyes grew moist and his voice shook as he said, "When he grew sick——"

"Ah, when he grew sick!" cried the old man bitterly. "Almost I lost my trust in the Giver of my child, and dared not give him back! How I begged! How I prayed!—you know!"

"Yes," whispered the stranger, "I know."

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"Then she left me for the first time," said the old man slowly. "For the first time. She went alone and prayed. Oh Rachel, my dear, dear wife, I could not go with you to God! I think even we go best alone! I said 'It cannot be! He cannot let it come! I have done all my life as best I knew how, and is this my reward?' And I heard her crying, and I wished I had never lived."

"But not for long?" said the other.

The old man smiled through his tears.

"No, no, not for long!" he said. "When Rachel saw that I was weak she grew strong. It is strange, but women are the strongest then. And she showed me the folly and wickedness of throwing away my faith because the Most Faithful had taken away my child. And she brought me my little daughters and set them on my knees and put her arms around my neck. So I grew comforted. And there have come other sons—Arthur and John. But he—ah, Rachel! Little we thought when we laid him on the grass under the tree and measured him with goldenrod, that he would so soon lie there for all our lives!"

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"And he lies there now," said the stranger.

"Yes," said the old man softly, "he lies there now. Under the apple tree where he lay and laughed that day, he lies there now. For Rachel wanted it so. 'I carried him out there the first time,' she said, 'and he always loved it there. I used to walk there before he came, and plan for him, how he should grow so great and famous and good; and now I want him to be there, while he is asleep. And I think that all the fields are God's —the orchard as well as the graveyard.' So we laid him there, and she goes there often, and I."

"You miss her?" said the stranger.

"Miss her?" said the old man, staring at the visitor, "miss her? Why, she is here! She is my wife!——" but he was alone, on the couch, with the faint breath of ripening apples dying on the air.

And as he turned wearily, the shadow crept softly and covered the porch and the couch where he lay. The sun dropped behind the hills and the air struck cold on his uncovered shoulders. He was too tired to cry, too old and weak to question or

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find fault, but he dimly felt that to be left alone was hard. His memory grew suddenly untrustworthy; had they come or not? It was all so plain to him now. He was not with Rachel, he was neither in the church nor in the garden nor in the orchard. He was an old man, strangely weak and confused, left alone.

"Ah, Rachel," he murmured, "only come again, while I go! Come to take me—not that it will be long to wait before I see you, dear! We have been so happy, you and I! But it was so cold——"

And then while he shivered helplessly and half afraid, there came the scent of spring lilac-bushes, and by his bed stood the bright-eyed child.

"Come! come and sit by me!" cried the old man. But the boy only smiled. "Take my hands—they are so cold!" he begged. Still the boy smiled. And as the old man looked, the child's eyes filled him with half hope, half fear. "Are you—are you——" he tried to speak, but no sound came from his lips.

"If I come and touch you," said the boy, "it will be the end. Shall I come?" The old man's face lighted softly.

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"Yes," he said in his heart, for he could not speak aloud, "yes, come now!" The boy laughed and stepped to the couch and lay down beside him, putting his cheek close to the white hair.

Into the heart of the old man rushed a quick, new life. "Ah, Rachel, Rachel," he said strong and clear, "sit on the step and eat your cake with me? Here is the flag-root I promised you—it's quite clean. I took off all the mud! And here is the red marble"—but the child kissed him and he went to sleep, holding to his heart his happy youth.

And when they found him in the evening, they were not too grieved, for on his face was a great content.

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